

STORY DOCTORS

By Boori Monty Pryor, illustrated by Rita Sinclair

CULTURAL SAFETY

Before you begin, carefully consider the steps you can take to ensure that you are providing a culturally safe and inclusive space for everybody in your classroom and school. This may include undertaking cultural competency training, bringing First Nations Australian speakers into your classroom, and reading widely and proactively to self-educate yourself.

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 7 – 12 (a picture book for older readers)

MIDDLE to UPPER PRIMARY/Years 2 – 7, but relevant for all ages

THEMES: Australian history, Reconciliation, Aboriginal Australia, First Nations culture, Indigenous languages, Nature, Australian animals, Own Voices, Introduced species/Invasion, Terra Nullius, Inclusiveness, Us

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- **NAIDOC 2021**
- **English: Literature, literacy and language**
- **Science**
- **HASS**
- **Visual Arts**
- **Cross-curriculum priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, sustainability and wellbeing**

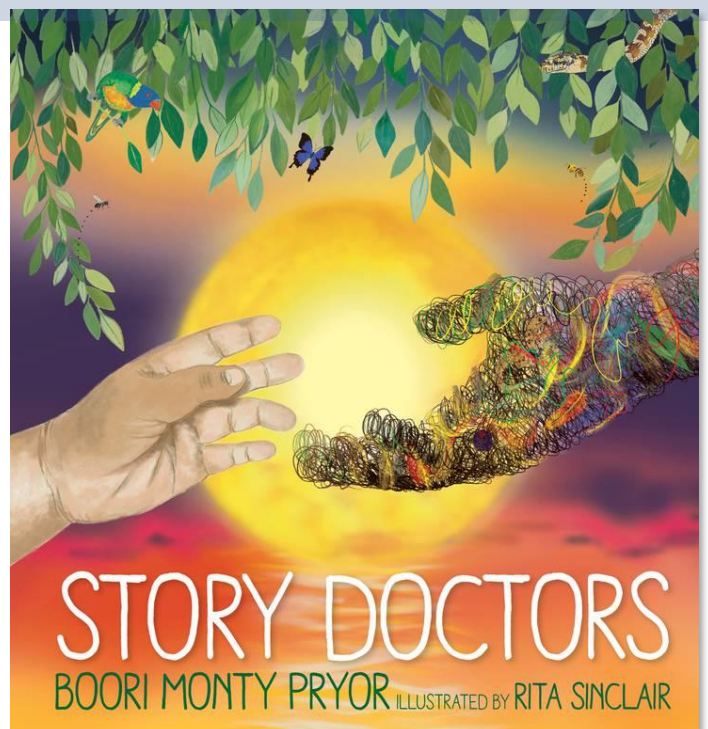
NOTES WRITTEN BY: Rita Sinclair

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CONTENTS:

Introduction	2
Story summary	2
In the words of the author: 'Eco Echoes Words of Medicine'	2
Before reading <i>Story Doctors</i>	3
Q&A with the author and illustrator	4
Classroom discussions and activities	5
NAIDOC 2021: Heal Country activities	5
English	8
Science	11
HASS	13
Visual Arts	14
Cross curriculum ATSI Histories and Culture	15
Cross curriculum Sustainability	17
Cross curriculum Wellbeing	18
Creator backgrounds	19
Cultural processes	19
Corresponding literature and other resources	20
Worksheet 1; Worksheet 2 and colouring page	



INTRODUCTION

Story Doctors is an empowering story for all Australians, acknowledging our true history, embracing inclusivity, and celebrating the healing powers of nature and culture.

STORY SUMMARY

Story Doctors is a celebration of the power of stories to unite us, how nature connects us, and the revelation that the medicine needed for healing lies within us all. Follow legendary storyteller Boori Monty Pryor through 80,000+ years of strength, sickness, and immense possibility. Accept his invitation to follow the journey, and be part of the healing.

IN THE WORDS OF THE AUTHOR: 'ECO ECHOES, WORDS OF MEDICINE'

'Somewhere in the midst of 2018, I had this feeling that one day very soon, our country, Australia, was going to get very sick. We as a nation have been unwell for a very long time now, and I myself was sick of being sick, and felt that what we all needed was a different kind of medicine. The kind that should have been taken well before those annoying symptoms raised their ugly heads.

'The medicine I'm talking about is a very special kind of medicine. And it can only be found in one place. It's right there in those eco echoes – the ones that have travelled through the voices from the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

'Australia is made up of thirty per cent desert, and is the driest continent in the world. First Nations people were shaped from and by the earth. We know each other very well – so much so that we define longevity and defy logic. So, this got me thinking, could there be any way possible to take these eco echoes, and shape their wise voices into written words of medicine?

'Fear, anger, self-loathing, loss of worth and guilt punctured my heart again. I cried, I sobbed, I yelled, I screamed, I was in so much pain that I felt I couldn't stop the bleeding. Because I knew that if I had any chance at all to have these written words listen to those eco echoes, I'd have to wrestle with these monsters once again.

'As I began to write, there in my small room in Carlton, Melbourne, these monsters surrounded me, looking for a fight. I wrestled and fought to pick my words carefully, denying them any chance to poison my thoughts.

'Then, two lines in one month, my heart stopped bleeding. Five lines in two months, band-aids appeared. Ten lines in three months, the pain still lingered. Then, six lines in one month, I was breathing with no pain in my heart.

'My heart was happy. Because these eco echoes and those written words have finally met, and like each other. So now they have gotten together and shaped these wise voices into written words of medicine.

'Hopefully, when you read these words, unknowingly, you will taste that medicine. I fought so very hard to find a way to heal – I really gave it my best shot. I hope you find yourself, alive and well, within the covers of this book.'

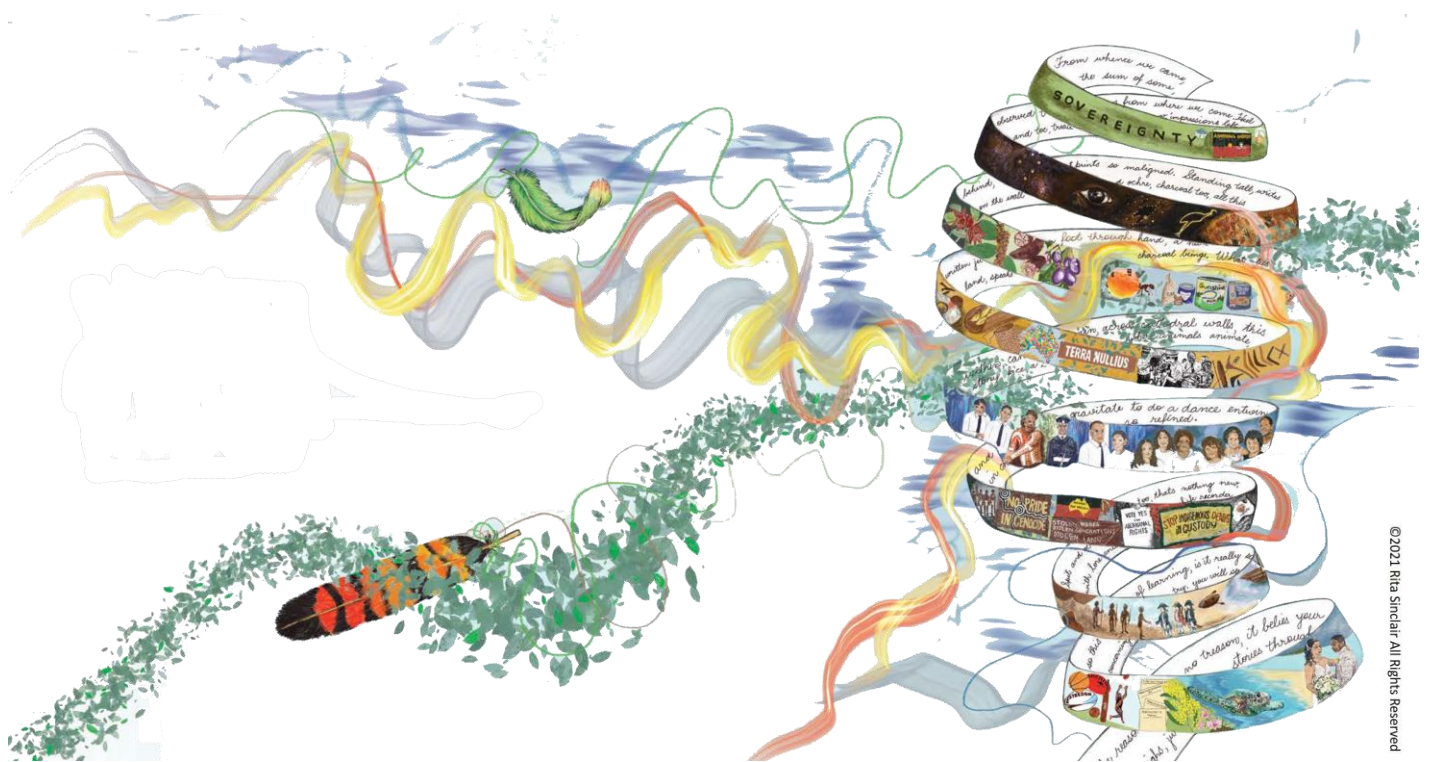
– Boori Monty Pryor, 2021

BEFORE READING *STORY DOCTORS*

Look at the front cover of *Story Doctors* and ask the following questions:

- What do you think the two hands reaching together might symbolise here?
- Look at the hand on the right. Why do you think it is made of thread?
- Look closely at this hand. Can you see anything within the thread?
- Why do you think these might have been included?
- Do the colours and the image of the sun remind you of the Aboriginal flag?
- Can you make out the shape of the top half of hearts made from the leaves?
- What do the sunset and hearts make you feel about the story to come?
- Why might the book’s illustrator have included a native bee (on the left) and a European honeybee (on the right)?
- Can you name the other creatures on the cover and guess why you think they have been included?

After students answer these questions, ask them to write a paragraph on what they think *Story Doctors* will be about.



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Q&A WITH THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR: BOORI MONTY PRYOR AND RITA SINCLAIR

What do you see as the main features of the book?

BM-P: Knowing that what we're walking on can heal us.

RS: I see *Story Doctors* as an invitation to find out more about the history of Australia. Ignorance and fear often stem from a lack of understanding. Boori's words and the way he invites us to sit and listen is the first step to educating and eradicating the ignorance so that healing can start to happen for all of us. Boori and I have worked very hard not to tell readers what to think or feel – rather, we have given them a starting point, from which to go and find out more, wherever they are up to in the story of our shared history.

What is the essence of this book?

BM-P: Simplicity lies at the heart of this book. Two people looking through separate windows, seeing the same thing, while making medicine through words of colour.

Rita, can you tell us more about the inspiration for your illustrations?

RS: The illustrations for *Story Doctors* were born from many phone conversations with Boori, with him reading me the poem and explaining what he was saying in each phrase. He would talk, I would ask questions and sketch. We did this for weeks, until I had enough ideas for the first roughs.

The little string person represents all of us – I wanted everybody that reads it to be able to imagine themselves walking through the landscape, exploring the animal tracks, the evidence of an incredible culture, caretaking the land, being in tune with the rhythm and flow of the land and all living things; and, like the string person, to pick up knowledge and experiences and find things they want to know more about. The illustration Boori has named the 'apple peel' shows a close-up of the string person's threads, displaying moments in history that are part of Australia's story.

What art media did you use to create the beautiful imagery?

RS: I enjoy drawing with pencil or pen, but for this book I decided to have a go at digital drawing, something I hadn't done before. I still have so much to learn, but I have enjoyed using the app Procreate on my iPad to create the illustrations for *Story Doctors*. One amazing thing about using the app is that it records how long I spend on each drawing, as well as how many pencil strokes I have used.

I work as a teacher, which is very demanding on my time, so it was only during holiday time that I had any length of time to spend on illustrating. I had a friend who would come over once a week to make sure I was drawing. We had an elaborate plan that involved getting takeaway for dinner, and she would work on what she needed to do and I would draw before she had to pick her daughter up from dancing. The problem was that there was always some other project that popped up that we had to do first, so although her intentions were great, I didn't get much drawing done on those Thursday nights! Christmas holidays, on the other hand, were spent drawing... every day.

What are some of the key features of the book that make it special?

RS: *Story Doctors* is accessible to a wide range of ages. Younger students can be absorbed by the illustrations – tracking the native and introduced animals through the book, finding the hidden geckos and watching the string person pick up things as they walk through and experience the story.

Older children can read the poem and enjoy the illustrations, and university students can study the hidden nuances in my illustrations and Boori's choice of words to tell the history of Australia – why we as a nation are hurting, and what the first steps are to start the healing together.

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

NAIDOC 2021 – HEAL COUNTRY

Read Boori's open letter in the Afterword – 'Eco Echoes, Words of Medicine'. Here he talks about the reasons why Australia, as a country, is hurting.

Class discussion

- What does Boori Monty Pryor mean when he says, 'We as a nation have been unwell for a very long time now, and I myself was sick of being sick'?
- What do you think the 'eco echoes' and 'words of medicine' might be?
- What medicine do you think Boori Monty Pryor is referring to here?
- Who or what are the monsters he describes?
- How is the concept of reconciliation explored in the imagery of the eco echoes and written words meeting and liking each other to form the necessary medicine?
- Does this book and its 'Eco Echoes, Words of Medicine' make you optimistic about Australia's future?

Language carries culture

Out of the 250 First Nations languages spoken before invasion, 60 are considered 'alive' and in use as a first language today (<https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/language/>).

Through language, people are connected with their ancestors and their land, and if the language declines, so too does thousands of years of cultural understanding, and the sense of identity of a people. The loss of languages caused by government policy has had a huge effect on the health of our country, because language contains ideas about how you look at the world, and reflects family and community relationships, knowledge about food and health, art and music, spirituality and the environment.

- Listen to the [recordings of Boori reading *Story Doctors*](#) in English (online) and in Kunggandji (coming soon). Is this the first time you have heard an Aboriginal or Torres Straight Islander language? Do the Traditional Owners where you live still have their language? Is there somewhere where you can learn some words or phrases to use at your school, e.g. words for welcome or learning that can be included on your school's social media page, website or newsletter?
- Watch the [interviews with the creators](#) of *Story Doctors* for more of Boori's vision for healing country.

The story circles that make up part of the songline at the end of the book are all things or actions that give Boori hope (see p18 of these notes for a full description of what these story circles stand for). Below are some activities that Boori has used with many schools across Australia that fit beautifully with the 2021 NAIDOC theme – Heal Country.

Back to our roots

- Healing Country comes from the bottom, where the roots are. Go outside with your class (or group of children) and find the biggest tree you can find at school or at the closest park. Take time to examine it. Run the dirt at the bottom of the tree through your fingers. What colour is it? Does it have animals living in it or is it dry and dusty? Sit quietly around the tree – are the roots visible above the ground? Feel the bark. What does it feel like? Hug the tree. Can you hug it by yourself or do you need some friends to get all the way around the tree? Look for any evidence of animals that are living or hanging out in the tree. If you are quiet, you may hear bees or birds or insects. Maybe there are possums or sugar gliders or koalas in your tree. Maybe you're lucky enough to have a tree kangaroo.
- Divide the class into 3 groups. One group has the bottom of the tree with the roots that go into the ground. One group has the middle of the tree with the trunk and supporting branches that stretch out. One group has the top of the tree with the smaller branches and leaves providing the shade.

Each group does a drawing of their section of the tree and includes how that section of the tree helps the land, animals and people. For example, for the bottom part of the tree, the roots hold the soil together, particularly on the banks of rivers to stop erosion; the roots and bark provide homes for insects etc. For the middle of the tree, the trunk is a super highway for animals. It could also be home to several animals and they might be living in hollow branches or under the bark. Some of the bark is used for medicine, or to make string, or canoes, or to paint on. The top of the tree has the canopy which gives us all shade and houses lots of birds and other animals. The leaves are used for medicine or in smoking ceremonies. The trees also help absorb carbon dioxide.

- Once the sections have been finished, put the tree back together. Discuss the importance of the trees and why we need to look after them. Adopt a tree at school or the park and look after it, or plant some new trees where they are needed.
- Land is a link between all aspects of First Nations peoples' existence. As Boori explains it, 'We are from the earth and for the earth.' Help children understand and recognise that by nurturing, protecting and maintaining the land, they are also nurturing, protecting and maintaining all aspects of First Nations culture and spirituality.
- When Boori visits schools, he makes the schools into sacred places before inviting children to choose a place that is special to them. Invite children in the class to choose a space in the school that is special to them.

As a class, walk around the school to each of these sacred sites and dance and sing in that space together after the custodian of the place explains why it is sacred to them. When all of the places have been travelled to and visited, make a map of each sacred place with connections between each site.

IN CONTEXT: CEREMONY

Take some time to educate yourself about the purpose and importance of ceremony in First Nations culture. Here are some resources to get you started.

<https://tribalwarrior.org/portfolio/aboriginal-ceremonies-performances/>

<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-perspectives/resources/aboriginal-ceremonies>

<https://northernterritory.com/things-to-do/art-and-culture/aboriginal-culture/aboriginal-music-and-dance>

- In *Story Doctors*, on several of the pages and on the cover, you may have noticed a little native bee and a European bee buzzing around together looking for some blossoms. In Boori's picture book *Shake a Leg*, illustrated by Jan Ormerod, they talk about the honey bee dance. It was a warning dance to tell everyone that those new bees have stingers and they will sting you.

Have a go at learning and doing the honey bee dance, or think about some of the other new animals or sights that First Nations people are having to deal with in *Story Doctors*. Create a dance to teach the others about any danger or new information. You could also create some symbols and draw the dance on a wall, or on paper that you can put up in your classroom later. See if the other people in your group understand the message through the dance and the drawings you have done.

When Boori finished the poem *Story Doctors*, he shared it with friends and received some amazing feedback. These friends have kindly given permission to reproduce their responses, which the author and illustrator feel capture the essence and message they were hoping to inspire with *Story Doctors*.

Two separate households were struggling with finding the right help for their beautiful, strong, intelligent young ones. Coincidentally, both young men, from different backgrounds and families, were feeling lost and disconnected. Here are the responses:

We need to heal generations of unrest, broken trust and war in our ancestral family DNA...it has affected my children, me, my parents, their parents and my god only knows how many more...and I am just referring to our history, let alone our shared history, Boori, as perpetrators of wrongdoing on your people...our First Nations peoples. It all started there...thinking that 'we' know better. Your medicine has the chance to heal the world – if we could all just stop and listen.

– a mum (P) for her son

*How do we make ourselves whole? How do we heal the wounds of history; how do we journey into our own hearts when our nation's heart is so wounded? In the afterword to this book, Boori reveals the pain that sits beneath the words that shaped *Story Doctors*. Words forged in fire that nevertheless emerged tenderly, delicately, only revealing themselves as he allowed the pain a space, a shape, a place, a form. We sit atop 200 years of hearts' oppression in this country, two hundred years of the cultural centre of our nation being denied and suffocated – Boori knows this almost better than anyone.*

*When Boori was writing *Story Doctors*, my beautiful, intelligent, thoughtful 21-year-old son was peering into his own abyss and struggling to find reasons to live, confronted by both the weight of self and fragility of nation. 'We live on stolen land, Dad. We've taken everything and it's like we don't even care.' *Story Doctors*, both in word and images, offers a way forward that connects us deeply to the ancestral heart of this country, and this is a gift for all of us – 'eco, echoes' that call us toward our own healing.*

– a dad (J) for his son

While working with some young men and women in a youth detention centre, Boori showed them *Story Doctors* and the afterword from the back of the book. When asked what wasn't included in the text, the children responded with: 'racism...hate...anger...'

And then, when asked what was there, they replied: '**us...all of us**'.

If a group of young people behind bars can see what we are trying to achieve, hopefully our leaders can get on board too.

We welcome your stories, feedback and reactions to the medicine within the pages of *Story Doctors*.

Thank you, Boori & Rita

ENGLISH: LANGUAGE

Language and culture

Many First Nations words have made their way into Australian English. In the latest Australian National Dictionary, there are 500 such words recorded, which come from 100 First Nations languages. Do some research and see if you can find some of them. There may also be some placenames around your town or in your state or territory that come from a First Nations language. Do you speak or know the names of any of the language(s) of the Traditional Owners where you are living? Who can you go and see to learn more about this? Discuss language-sharing initiatives occurring where you live with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait educator or community representative.

Read, listen and respond

- Read the story through once by yourself. Then listen to the recordings of the author, Boori Monty Pryor, reading the story in both English and Kungandji – available by scanning the QR code at the front of the book, or going to www.allenandunwin.com/story-doctors. Did hearing Boori read the story give you a better understanding of its rhythm?
- Using a transcript of the text, firstly mark which lines of the verse are on each page. Then listen again to Boori reading the story in English.
 - Notice where he slows down, pauses or stops.
 - Where does he speed up?
 - Is he quiet in some areas and louder in others?
 - From listening to Boori read, can you tell which parts of the book are really important to him?
 - Make some symbols as a class to represent slow, fast, quiet, loud and other things you have decided to track. Using your symbols mark out on the text where it changes during the reading.
 - Once you have mapped out how Boori reads, have a go at reading the book using your ‘map’. Do you feel more connected to the words reading it this way?

Lyrical text and creating verse

Boori identifies most with the title of Storyteller, over all of his other achievements. He works very hard to choose words that include and welcome everybody into his storytelling.

Story Doctors has poetic language written in verse form that allows the words to flow through the book with an underlying heartbeat. It is Boori’s experience storytelling to the millions of children at schools all over Australia that has helped his ability to shape and choose the precise words that welcome all in to the story and that leave out the hate and fear and blame.

- After studying Boori’s style of writing, have a go at writing a verse for each of the double-page spreads that have no text.

Culture and identity

- Language is tied very closely to culture and identity. Have you heard any languages other than English spoken in Australia? What languages have you heard and where did you hear them? You may have been to a Chinese New Year celebration, a Greek festival, an African drumming performance, or maybe just eaten at a restaurant with traditional food from a different country. As a class, count up the different languages you have heard.

- Listen to Boori read the story in English and then Kunggandji. This may be the first time you have heard an Aboriginal language. Why do you think the government tried to stop First Nations people from using their traditional languages and dialects?
- Research the different languages that were spoken in Australia before invasion. Do you know the Traditional Owners of the land where you live and go to school? Do they still have their language? Where can you learn more about First Nations languages in your local area or an area close to you?
- What cultures are represented in your class? Do those children speak the same language as their parents or grandparents? Were any of these relatives forbidden by the Australian government to use their native language?
- In the Western world, you are celebrated if you know more than one non-Indigenous language, yet First Nations children from remote communities who can, incredibly, speak up to seven languages and dialects as well as English are not applauded and celebrated for this as they deserve to be. Rather, some educators focus solely on these children's use of Australian Standard English. What can you do in your class or school to celebrate First Nations languages?

Using words for emphasis

- On page 5 there is a lace monitor being drawn on the cave wall by the thread person. The rest of the animals are all waiting for their turn to be drawn. In your opinion, which animal should feature next? Use emotive language to explain why your favourite Australian animal should go up on the wall. Have a debate with your class about who should win the best spot on the wall.
- On page 5 the first verse finishes with '*This stony face, a storied place*' and on page 16, the second verse finishes with '*That stony face, our storied place*'. Why do you think Boori repeated this phrase but changed that one word? What has happened in the story to make him choose to highlight the change and emphasise that stony face as 'our' storied place?

ENGLISH: LITERATURE

Responding to literature

- Discuss what you liked and what you didn't like about reading *Story Doctors* and then express your point of view by writing a book review that you can share with your school or local library.

Examining literature

- What did the author and the illustrator do that helped hold your attention while reading *Story Doctors*? Make a table with author on one side and illustrator on the other side, and under the corresponding headings, put the techniques/parts/phrases/images that made you either stop and think, or look again.
- How did the illustrations help you to understand the text, and how did reading the text help you to understand the illustrations? Does the text tell a different story to the illustrations? Explain your reasons for your answers.

Creating literature

- Choose one native Australian animal and one introduced animal from *Story Doctors*, e.g. scrub turkey and chicken, kangaroo and sheep, native bee and honey bee. Write a story about how they met and how they learned to get along with each other.
- Choose your favourite page from *Story Doctors* and write in your own words what Boori has said with his precise verse.

ENGLISH: LITERACY

Visual literacy

- Refer to the two pages that have no text (page 8–9 and 10–11). How are they the same, and how are they different? Using **Worksheet 1** at the end of these notes, with just the illustrations to guide you, describe what has happened or is happening in each double spread.
- Annotate directly on the sheet to explain what you can see or what you think has taken place and your reasons for thinking this.

Songlines

IN CONTEXT: SONGLINES

Songlines are a form of communication across the land and a way of mapping country that traces astronomy and geographic elements from ancient stories. Here is a starting point for some further reading about songlines:

<https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/songlines>

The circles and prints at the front and the circles at the end of the book represent songlines (see related illustrations on pages 2, 3, 20, 26 and 27 of the book, and p18 of these notes for a description of each story circle and what they stand for). At the start, they show special places or achievements of First Nations Australian peoples.

The songlines over the first two pages of the book overlay the tracks and routes of early Australians and highlight special and sacred places or achievements. The circles show places of food sources from fresh water and seawater; the importance of fresh water and sacred ceremony places; Lore and stories told around the fire: history, rules and stories passed by word of mouth, as well as through dancing, music and art; and knowledge about the stars and the seasons and cycles of the Earth.

- Think about your achievements, and the special places that mean something to you or are tied to special memories or your hobbies and pasttimes. Create some personal symbols that represent those things. Draw them in circles and connect them together to create your own personal map or songline.
- The story circles that make up part of the songline at the end of the book are all things or actions that give Boori hope. What gives you hope? Did the songline you made above include people or activities that make you feel good?

History vs our story

One of the story circles on the last pages of the story has a history book with the letters H and I crossed out and OUR written above it.

- What is your history? When were you born, where were you born, where do you go to school, what grade are you in etc? What are the facts?
- What is your story? What do you like doing, what motivates you etc? What are all of those moments in between the facts that make you who you are?

Belonging

...if we listen, we all belong. The last line of *Story Doctors* is asking us not to just listen to the words but also to the heartfelt emotions and feelings expressed through the words.

- Have students stand around the room. Read out statements, and where a statement applies to them, ask students to move to the centre of the room. Students can look around and see who else is in the same 'group' as them. Examples of statements that could be used include: if you have long hair, if you have a pet, if you have a brother etc. (Do not include statements about students' cultural backgrounds.) Point out after the activity that while students may belong to one or a few particular groups, they can still be connected to the others.
- On a piece of paper, ask students to write down all of the groups they belong to. This could include sport, scouts, band, family, friends, theatre, choir, gymnastics, volunteer etc. Then invite students to write down what they have learned from each group.
- Discuss what it feels like when you belong.
- Create a display in the classroom to show that each person belongs. It could be a tree with children as the leaves, or a bird with children as the feathers, or handprints on a cave wall from everyone. (This activity about belonging could also be used for a Wellbeing activity.)

SCIENCE: BIOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Animal identification and classification

- Which classes of animals are represented in the book? Which ones are missing? What pages could the missing animals be added to? (Select the correct habitat for each missing animal).
- Choose your favourite animal from the book and write an information report on that animal.

Life cycle

- Choose an animal from *Story Doctors*. Describe and draw the life cycle of that animal.
- The butterfly that appears in the book is the Ulysses butterfly. The Ulysses butterfly is attracted to red and pink flowers, so planting pentas or other pink and red flowers would help encourage these butterflies to collect nectar. The Euodia Elleryana tree is what the Ulysses caterpillars feed on. Find out which butterflies live in your area, and what plants they are attracted to. Perhaps students from your school could plant some of these. Then you could monitor the life cycle of these butterflies as a school.

SCIENCE: EXPERIMENTING

Planting and growing

On pages 10–11, we see how sheep and cattle have compacted the previously loose, fertile ground where food once grew easily and plentifully, causing the land where these cattle and sheep were fenced in to become dry and cracked.

- As an experiment, try growing a bean or sunflower (something fast growing). Have one pot with loose, premium potting mix, and the other pot with dirt that has been rammed down hard (to imitate the sheep and cattle) after the seed has been planted. Observe the two pots and see which one grows first. Report your findings, including how long each one took to germinate and the growth after certain times.

SCIENCE: NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT

Earth rhythms

Many First Nations peoples live closely within the rhythms of the earth, using the natural world to gather evidence and develop explanations about the different seasons and corresponding actions that need to be taken or the food that is available at certain times. First Nations cultures recognise many more seasons than the four European seasons you may know (summer, autumn, winter and spring). The CSIRO website has downloadable Indigenous Seasons from the following language groups <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-environment/land/about-the-calendars>:

- Gulumoerrgin/Larrakia people from the Darwin region in the Northern Territory
 - Ngan'gi, MalakMalak and Wagiman people from the Daly River region in the Northern Territory
 - Tiwi people from the Tiwi Islands north of Darwin in the Northern Territory
 - Kunwinjku people from Western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory
 - Gooniyandi and Walmajarri people from the Fitzroy River area in the Kimberley region of Western Australia
 - Ngadju people from the Great Western Woodlands region in South-West Western Australia
 - Kundjeyhmi people from the Ngurrungurrudjba (Yellow Water) region in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory.
- Have a look at the calendars to see what events and activities are recorded. Now think about where you live. What would you include in a seasonal calendar for your town or school? Is it harvesting or planting time for sugar cane, or are the cherries ripening? Is it football or cricket season? Are you likely to be attacked by a plover or a magpie if you are walking outside?
 - Use your powers of observation to collect the data and gather the evidence you need before creating your own seasonal calendar.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

History

Native animals and introduced animals are used to represent First Nations peoples and Europeans respectively throughout *Story Doctors*. Some European people went to Australia expecting to see empty land, based on Captain Cook's early and false claim of Terra Nullius.

Upon discovering Australia was not uninhabited, what these European people didn't notice, or chose to ignore because it didn't fit in with their expectations, were the achievements of the First Nations people, including the carefully cultivated land and terraced yam crops as far as the eye could see, and the thriving environment. The heavy weight and the cloven hooves of the introduced animals soon trampled and compacted the soil that had been carefully managed for thousands of years.

- Look at pages 14–15, which show a kangaroo and the sheep drinking from the same waterhole. What does this image mean to you?

The illustrator wanted to symbolise the different approaches that the two groups had towards the land. The kangaroo has hopped slowly and gently to the water's edge so as not to disrupt or break the fragile bank of the river, before carefully dipping its muzzle into the water and drinking. The sheep, on the other hand, has barged into the creek, stirring up the dirt and making the water muddy.

Similarly, the Europeans barged into Australia, disturbing what was there and what was working, because what they saw didn't fit into what they knew and were comfortable with and they didn't necessarily understand the different climate or landscape or how to work with it.

- What message do the words on this page convey? What do you think Boori Monty Pryor means when he writes *'This new age healing, that inner feeling, two centuries to cure, of belongings insecure'*?
- Look again at the two double-page spreads without text. They are actually the same scene before and after settlement. The first spread (pages 8–9) shows what life was like for First Nations peoples before the arrival of the Europeans. Can you see the yam fields, fish traps, harvesting of small amounts of indigenous fruit, grinding of native grains and seeds etc? The second spread (pages 10–11) shows some of the consequences of invasion.
 - What other changes can you notice? [Hints: The animals' heavier weight and cloven hooves compacted the carefully cultivated soil; trees were cut down to fence areas; the King Billy plate suggested honour but was also used as a method of control and power over strong First Nations leaders; the chain hints at the slavery and massacres that occurred; 'English' crops are not thriving; the natural waterway has been dammed up; downstream, the land is drying and cracking, and erosion is happening on the side of the bank, etc.]
 - Choose the 'before' or 'after' spread as inspiration and write about what life was like from the perspective of either a First Nations person or a European person.
 - Explore the long and continuous connection of First Nations people to country and explore how they look after the land, sea, waterways and sky.
- What would you like to learn more about from Australia's history?

Reference and analysis

- Find an old book about the history of Australia in your library and examine the information in it. Refer to **Worksheet 2**. After looking through the book, make a list of the information it presents about First Nations people. Take extra care to ensure a culturally safe environment for your students when looking at any potentially hurtful content.
 - Try to identify any different points of view presented in the book, and to distinguish facts from falsehoods.
- Think about the purpose of history books. Who are they written by? Why are they written? Who are they written for? Whose voice/s are heard within the pages? Whose voices are silenced or not heard? What are the outcomes of silencing particular voices or opinions in history? Compare your list you made from the old history book with content from one of the resources mentioned in the teaching notes. What are the similarities and what are the differences in the information? Why do you think there are these similarities and differences?

Civics and citizenship

One of the songline circles on pages 2–3 depicts how First Nations lore has been passed down through stories, dancing, singing and art since the beginning of time. Symbols have been drawn in the sand around the fire, and a didgeridoo and clapsticks lie nearby ready for ceremony. First Nations peoples have complex systems of beliefs, laws and traditions.

- Consider the words ‘lore’ and ‘law’. What do they mean and how are they different? Research the different parts of First Nations lives that lore touches.
- Which Australian laws created suffering rather than protection for First Nations Australian peoples? Research the Aboriginal Protection Act (1869), Half-Caste Act (1886), Aborigines Protection Act (1909), and the Aborigines Act (1969), which were all about control. How did the different acts try to control First Nations people over time? (e.g. Stolen Generations). Again, here and below, take extra care to ensure a culturally safe environment for your students when looking at sensitive and potentially hurtful content.
- What were First Nations people not permitted to do according to white Australia laws (e.g. speak their language), and what were they forced to ask permission for (e.g. permission to travel, to get married etc.)?
- What are some changes that need to happen now to help heal the past, so that all Australian people can move forward? Research and discuss topics such as Terra Nullius, the Stolen Generations, sovereignty, missions, stolen wages and payments in food rations rather than money and the Flora and Fauna Act.

VISUAL ARTS

Illustrations

Have a look at the front cover and the illustrations inside. First, ask students what they think the illustrator used to create the artworks. Then look on the imprint page, where it is noted that she used an iPad and pencil with the app Procreate – a digital drawing medium where the artist uses an electronic pencil just like a coloured pencil. There are shortcuts on the app to replicate similar sections of drawing (unfortunately, as this was the first time the illustrator had used this software, she didn’t know that was possible, so she drew every blade of grass and every little feather separately!) When using Procreate, you can see how much time has been spent on each illustration.

- Which artwork do you think took the illustrator the longest time to draw?
- Choose your favourite lines from the book and try doing some digital drawing inspired by it. There are lots of free drawing apps you can get if you have an iPad or tablet, or you could use the Paint program on a PC or laptop.

Visual Conventions – Texture

Texture definition is how something looks or feels to touch. Artists can use actual texture in their work, or they can suggest how something feels using lines, patterns and other drawing techniques to imply texture, which is called simulated texture.

Many simulated textures have been created in *Story Doctors*. Have a look at the rocks, the ground, grass, rock wall, fur/skin of the animals etc. Find some words to describe the textures you see e.g. fluffy, scaly, rough etc.

- Looking at the book and using your art book or some blank paper, have a go at recreating the simulated textures you can see. Try using different mediums (art materials). You could also try doing some rubbings of real textures (this technique is called frottage).

Symbolism

Sometimes artists use images to represent different concepts and ideas. The illustrator has used animals to symbolise different groups of people. The Australian native animals (particularly the kangaroos) have been used to represent First Nations peoples. The sheep and cows (also the chickens and honey bee) are the invading species that were introduced and made Australia their home. They represent the invading Europeans.

- Think about different groups of people that you know of. They could be stereotypes from movies, or groups that you belong to. Can you think of an animal that represents each group? Think of the characteristics of the animal and where the animal comes from. Can you draw the animal with some human characteristics that help symbolise the people you are representing?
- After drawing, explain why you chose that animal to represent the group and explain why you think that animal makes a good personification of that group. For example, a platypus could make a great cricket player: it has a great flat, broad tail for hitting balls and webbed hands to help catch the cricket ball.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY:

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES

Story Doctors is an invitation to find out more about the history of Australia – the history that doesn't appear in most history books. Many history books have been written for a particular purpose, usually representing a conquering group of people over all others.

'It doesn't matter where you are starting from in your knowledge and understanding – there is something for us all to learn in Story Doctors. Our aim with this book is that you would accept this invitation and take some time to listen. By listening, you learn; by learning, you can educate; by educating, you remove the fear and hatred; and by doing that, the healing can start to happen.'

– Rita Sinclair, 2021

'My thoughts and words are always about inclusiveness. So, when the word invasion is replaced by the word settled, the truth is excluded. Then there's no room for inclusion. And that's unsettling.'

– Boori Monty Pryor, 2021

Settled and unsettled, inclusion and exclusion. Invasion.

- Look at the words 'settled' and 'invaded' in relation to Australia's history. What does each word mean to you? What feelings does each word support? What do you think Boori means when he says that inclusion can't happen if the truth is excluded? Do you think this has something to do with the hurting that is happening in our country that Boori speaks of?
- We can't go back and change what has happened, but what Australians can do is to acknowledge the fact that there are and always were hundreds of different groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in Australia, with complex laws and family structures, with advanced systems of navigation and communication, and who have a wealth of knowledge about living off the land and maintaining fresh water and abundant food sources. Furthermore, we can acknowledge that these peoples' land was declared Terra Nullius as if they didn't even exist.
- What can you do as an individual to learn about our shared history? What can your class do to learn about our shared history? What can your school do to learn more about our shared history? We can all make a difference, by working to understand where we came from.

Being a part of the whole

In the Q&A above, the book's illustrator, Rita Sinclair, explains that the person made of thread who she illustrated for the the story represents all people:

I wanted everybody that reads this story to be able to imagine themselves walking through the landscape, exploring the animal tracks, the evidence of an incredible culture, caretaking the land, in tune with the rhythm and flow of the land and all living things; and, like the string person, to pick up knowledge and experiences and find things they want to know more about.

– Rita Sinclair 2021

The illustration that Boori named the 'apple peel' (page 21) shows a close-up of the string person's threads, displaying moments in history that are part of Australia's story. It doesn't cover everything (it is only the head of the 'thread person'), but it is a starting point to find out more.

- All of the images on the enlarged thread represent important moments in Australia's history. Why do you think some of these were included? Choose one moment, then research it and present your findings to the class.

Written in the stars

Europeans invading Australia came to certain assumptions about Australia and its people because things looked differently to what they were used to.

Money to launch Captain Cook's first voyage to Australia on the *Endeavour* was raised predominantly by a man called Joseph Banks, a botanist who then travelled to Australia on the ship and collected many samples of native flowers and tree samples here.

The *Endeavour* was scouting for new, supposedly empty land. But there was another reason behind its trip too. There was a comet due to pass by the Earth, and the best place to witness it was from one of the islands in the Pacific Ocean. Several astronomers were on board the *Endeavour*, and while they were stopped at Tahiti, they used their telescopes and measurements from different vantage points to calculate the distance of the comet from Earth. European astronomers used the bright lights of the stars in making their calculations.

First Nations peoples could navigate by the stars, but they also looked at the dark spaces between the lights. In the sky above Australia, the shape of an emu can be seen between the stars of the Milky Way. The illustrator has included this shape on page 3 of *Story Doctors*. First Nations peoples knew what time of the year it was (whether it was time to harvest or to fish or hunt certain animals or to collect eggs etc.) by looking at the sky and observing what form the emu took – was he pecking the ground, or running upright along the horizon, or resting?

Whether you choose to be guided by the bright lights of the stars or the dark space between them, neither way is wrong, just different in its approach.

- Research some of the other times the achievements, talents, complex family and kinship systems or advanced governing systems of First Nations peoples were overlooked by the Europeans because their methods of doing these things were so different.

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: SUSTAINABILITY

Australia's isolated and unique environment meant that historically, agricultural practices of First Nations peoples developed in unquestionably different ways to the methods of farming crops and domesticating animals practised in other parts of the world.

Some of the sustainable practices of First Nations peoples include:

- Crop cycles
 - Caring for the land
 - Fire stick farming: traditional land management
 - Not wiping out resources in any one area
 - Totem: don't hunt/eat your totem (protection of the species)
 - Hunt male instead of female animals to keep breeding cycles going
 - Budj Bim eel traps
 - Native grains
 - Working with the land rather than trying to change it
- Research the sustainable practices of First Nations peoples. Compare them with some Western agricultural practices, giving both unsustainable and sustainable examples. How can we be more innovative going forward, by including more First Nations traditional, sustainable processes along with state-of-the-art technology in order to protect Australia for future generations?

Knowledge from the inside out

The representations of the animals on cave paintings show all of the inside organs as well as the outside. This shows the complete knowledge of the animal including its strengths and weaknesses. Every part of the animal was used and there was no waste. This is another good example of First Nations peoples sustainable practices.

- Make a list of all of the ways an animal (such as a kangaroo) could be used.

Bush tucker

Bush tucker is all about making use of what grows locally in the area you live in. First Nations people had all of the nutrients, medicine and food they needed growing and living around them.

- What bush tucker can be found in your area?
- Can you plant a bush tucker garden in your school with plants that are native to your area?
- Research how bush tucker and traditional herbs, spices and flavours are finding their way into big city restaurants.

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: WELLBEING

The illustrations on the last pages of *Story Doctors* (pages 26–27) represent the hope that Boori feels and holds in his heart for Australia and all of us. Below is a description of the different story circles and what they stand for:

- HISTORY: becomes OUR STORY, an invitation to learn the true history of Australia and to rewrite the history books to include the achievements and knowledge of First Nations peoples.
 - FAMILY: The two animals – the carpet snake and scrub turkey – are Boori’s family totems. The pyramid in the background represents a natural landscape just south of Cairns in North Queensland, called the Pyramid. The Pyramid is part of a story about Djarragun (scrub turkey) from Yarrabah where Boori’s mother was from.
 - GENERATIONS: Hope comes in many forms but Boori finds it through working with the millions of children he works with in schools – the children who soak up Boori’s stories and go home and share them with their families.
 - SALTWATER AND FRESHWATER COUNTRY: we all belong – just like the fresh water that travels to the salt water to become one.
 - MEDICINE TREE: First Nations peoples believe that they don’t own the land; instead, they belong to the land and are charged with its care for the next generation. The medicine tree represents this belief – that if we look after the earth, it has the ability to look after us. Trees can provide us with food, medicine, shelter, transport, water, air...
 - STORY DOCTOR: Stethoscope and cracked earth. Similar to the medicine tree, our earth is crying out for love and water. Are we using our resources in the most sustainable way?
 - BUTTERFLY: Transformation, learning from each other, change, hope.
- Australia has many natural disasters. What effect does this have on our wildlife? Get in touch with an animal hospital and find out what you can do to help. Maybe you could sew or crochet pouches or volunteer your time.
 - There are many symbols of reconciliation and belonging throughout *Story Doctors*: humans coming together; animals and insects – native and introduced – sharing one land; and dual histories becoming entwined. Encourage students to make a list of as many symbols, both visual and textual, as they can find in the book. Once completed, ask them to choose the one that they felt was the most powerful and explain in a short written piece why they chose it.
 - Can you relate it to a time when you met somebody new or had to work together with somebody who was different to you? How did you get to know the other person? What actions did you take to make it easier to work with the other person?

CREATOR BACKGROUNDS



ABOUT BOORI MONTY PRYOR, THE AUTHOR

Boori Monty Pryor was born in Townsville, North Queensland. His father is from the Juru people of Cape Upstart from the Bowen region. His mother is a descendant of the Gurubana Moiety group from the Kunggandji Nation near Cairns. Boori is a multi-talented performer who has worked in film and television (as an actor and writer), modelling, sport, music and theatre-in-education. Boori has written several award-winning children's books, including Prime Minister's Literary Award winner *Shake a Leg*, and was Australia's inaugural Children's Laureate (with Alison Lester) in 2012 and 2013. He co-wrote and is the subject of *Wrong Kind of Black* (International Emmy Award nominee, screening on Netflix) and *Brown Paper Bag* (in which he also stars), and during his career as a storyteller he has worked with over one million children.

ABOUT RITA SINCLAIR, THE ILLUSTRATOR AND WRITER OF THESE NOTES

Rita Sinclair was born in Mareeba, north Queensland, and grew up a bit further south, in Townsville. As a child, she spent a lot of time daydreaming, drawing and reading, often in a tree or under its branches. Rita credits her mum for her love of all books (especially picture books), because books were a part of every birthday or Christmas. When her son, Cody, was born, Rita was excited to have a reason to buy more books. Now that he is grown up and married, she buys picture books for herself, just because. Rita has worked as an ice-cream and snack bar attendant, greyhound race photographer, wedding videographer, stained-glass overlay operator, teacher, librarian, wedding celebrant and now illustrator. She believes in lifelong learning and is always ready to learn something new – she often has several random courses lined up, and there is always a stack or two of books waiting for the holidays to be read.

CULTURAL PROCESSES

Thank you to Dr Jared Thomas for providing editorial advice on the First Nations Australian content included in these teachers' notes. Allen & Unwin strives to achieve cultural best practice at all times, which includes adhering to the AIATSIS [Ethical Publishing Guidelines](#), the AIATSIS [Code of Ethics](#), the Australia Council [Writing Protocols for Indigenous Australian Writing](#), and Terri Janke's seminal Indigenous Cultural IP advice in her essay '[More Than Words](#)', co-written with Anika Valenti and Laura Curtis.

CORRESPONDING LITERATURE: OTHER BOOKS BY BOORI MONTY PRYOR

- *My Girragundji 20th Anniversary Edition* (2018), co-written with Meme McDonald: The 20th anniversary edition of the award-winning, much loved story that tells how a little tree frog helps a boy find the courage to face his fears.
- *Shake A Leg* (2010), illustrated by Jan Ormerod: A unique picture book collaboration about having fun, sharing culture and the power of story and dance. A picture book to get the whole town dancing.
- *Maybe Tomorrow* (2010), co-written with Meme McDonald: From the Aboriginal fringe camps of his birth to the catwalk, basketball court, DJ console and more. This is a new anniversary edition of Boori Monty Pryor's life, his pain, his joy and his hopes, and is as powerful now as it was when it was first published in 1998.
- *Flytrap* (2002), co-written with Meme McDonald: Nancy wants so much to be the centre of attention at school that she makes up a story – a wish, really. But with the help of stories from both sides of her family – white Australian and Aboriginal – she learns something about what is true for her, and what she herself has to offer.
- *Njunjul the Sun* (2002), co-written with Meme McDonald: A 16-year-old Aboriginal boy leaves his family and home for the big city, and as he struggles to make sense of his experience he realises that he must have the knowledge of his own people and culture in order to know who he is, and to find his direction.
- *The Binna Binna Man* (1999), co-written with Meme McDonald: The powerful story of an Aboriginal teenage boy who is caught between the attractions of city life and the ways of his people. After a terrifying encounter with the Binna Binna man he knows what he must do in order to be true to himself.

FILM RESOURCES

[Brown Paper Bag](#) – Boori stars in, co-wrote and is the star of this short children's film

[Behind the Scenes of Brown Paper Bag](#) – a complementary mini-documentary, created as a surprise for Boori by Youthworx filmmaker Hayden Layton, also well worth checking out.

[Bonus video content](#) (and audio readings) from the creators about *Story Doctors*

OTHER RESOURCES

William Ricketts Sanctuary, Melbourne

[Free downloadable colouring-in sheet created by Rita Sinclair](#)

ONLINE RESOURCES

www.creativespirits.info

www.CSIRO.au

www.commonground.org.au

www.deadlystory.com

CULTURAL COMPETENCY RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

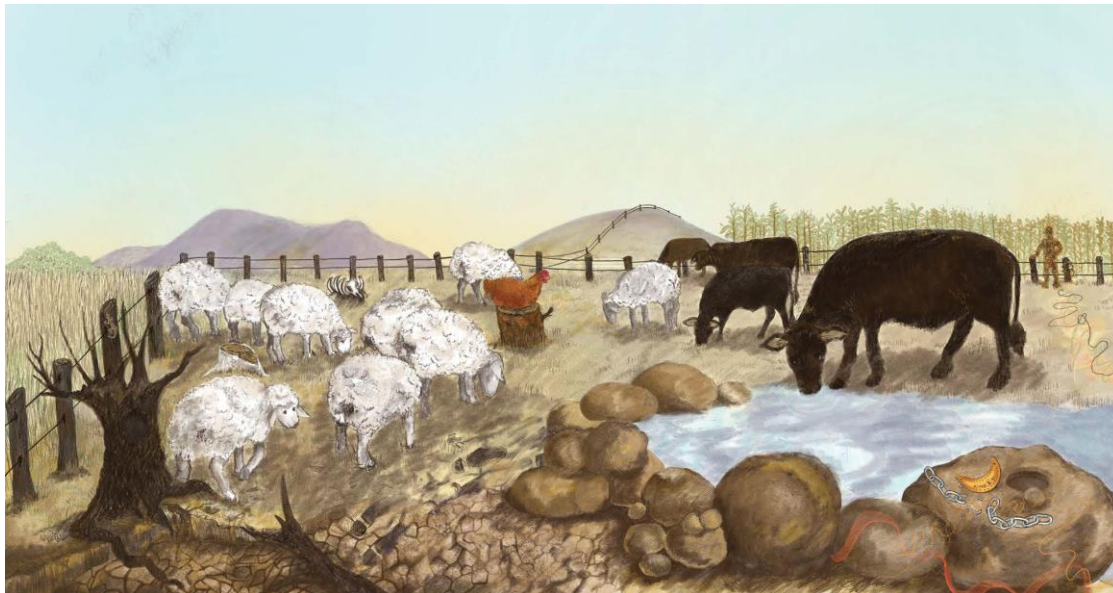
[Reconciliation NSW's culturally competent teaching advice](#)

[Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Education's Narra Gunna Wali platform for educators](#)

[UniSA's Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation teacher resource](#)

WORKSHEET 1: Visual Literacy

Describe what has happened or is happening in each double spread.



WORKSHEET 2: FACTS or FALSEHOODS

Find an **old** book about the history of Australia in your library and examine the information in it to identify different points of view and distinguish the facts from falsehoods. After looking through the book, make a list of the information presented about First Nations peoples. Based on what you've discovered by reading *Story Doctors*, from conducting further research, and from what you know to be true from your own experiences in life, read through your list and indicate what you believe to be **Fact** or **Falsehood**.

INFORMATION FOUND	FACT / FALSEHOOD

