



# mallee sky

TEACHER NOTES

JODI TOERING & TANNYA HARRICKS

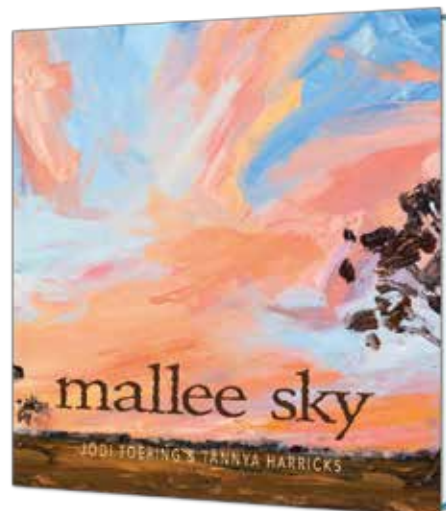


# mallee sky

An extremely timely and beautiful picture book about the effects of drought and climate change in the Mallee.

The first people of the land call the Mallee “Nowie”. It means sunset country. When the sun goes down the red heat of the day bleeds into the sky and sets it on fire. Drought and rain – life under a Mallee Sky.

This poetic text by emerging author Jodi Toering is beautifully accompanied by lush oil paintings by fine artist and illustrator Tannya Harricks.



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## JODI TOERING

Jodi was born in the Mallee at Hopetoun and grew up on a wheat farm outside a small town called Beulah. As a child, she was fascinated with stories, reading on her own well before she went to school. When she didn't have her nose in a book, Jodi spent her time drawing or writing. She had two dreams: becoming an English teacher and writing picture books for children.

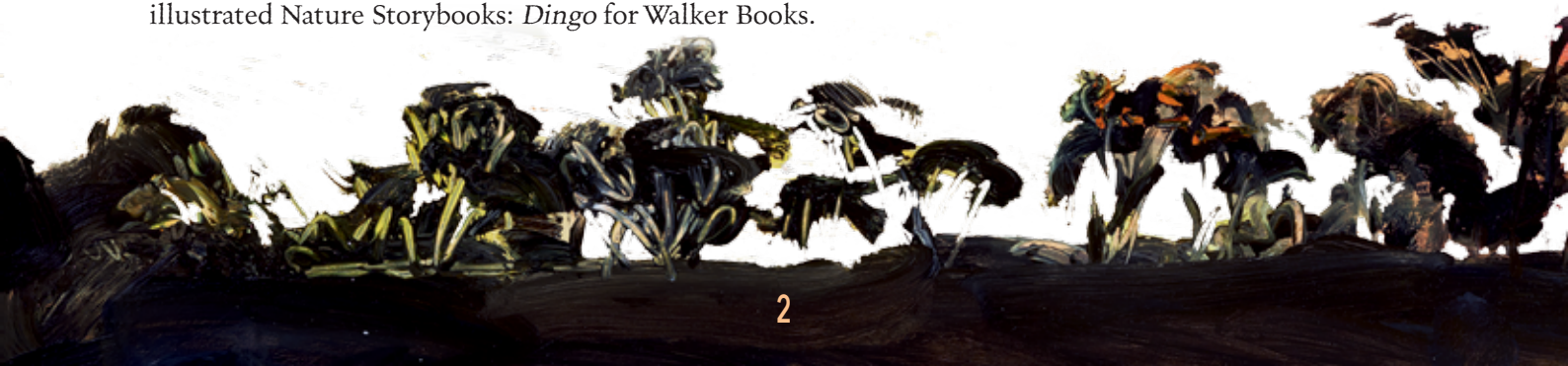
Fast forward several decades, we now find Jodi juggling the roles of full time-teacher, mother, and performer. This might seem more than enough for some, but not for Jodi, recently adding one more string to her bow and following her childhood dream of becoming an author.

In her spare time, Jodi loves creating artworks and spending time on her bush block with her husband, her two beautiful children and the ever-growing menagerie of chickens, ducks, dogs, and rabbits that share their home ...



## TANNYA HARRICKS

Tannya Harricks is an award-winning visual artist/painter based in Sydney, Australia. Her paintings are derived from sketches done out in the landscape and brought to life in the studio with intense layers of oil paint and bold, confident brushstrokes. She has exhibited in Sydney for many years and has been awarded the Waverley Art Prize and Hornsby Art Prize. She has also been a finalist in many prominent Australian art awards including the Mosman Art Prize, Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize, Muswellbrook Art Prize, Benalla Nude, Gallipoli Art Prize and the Gold Coast Art Prize. She has previously illustrated Nature Storybooks: *Dingo* for Walker Books.



# Q & A with the creators

## JODI TOERING

***Mallee Sky* opens a window to the beauty and the harshness of the Mallee. What inspired you to tell the story of this particular area?**

The Mallee holds a special place in my heart and will always be my home. I was born in Hopetoun and grew up on a wheat farm just outside Beulah. With *Mallee Sky*, I wanted to highlight the simple pleasures and contrasting hardships that constitute life in the area. I felt it was time to tell the Mallee's story, share its harsh beauty (which Tannya Harricks has captured so incredibly in her stunning illustrations) and help to inspire hope for so many people affected by drought.

**Do you think it is important for young readers who may live in cities and suburbs to experience rural life through books?**

Books are magical. They have the power to provide rich experiences and open up a window into a whole new world for readers, young and old. As a teacher in a regional city in Victoria, I know that many students I work with have never travelled to or experienced life in rural areas, so books are of course an incredible resource to provide insights and spark curiosity.

***Mallee Sky* is your first published book. How have you found the experience of being an author?**

Being an author is a new and exciting experience for me. I have loved every step of the process and have enjoyed learning along the way. Probably the biggest thing I have discovered is that there is so much more to being an author than just writing a book!

## TANNYA HARRICKS

**What research went into your preparation for illustrating *Mallee Sky*?**

I took a big road trip from Sydney to the Mallee and could notice the changing landscape as I entered and left the Mallee region. I experienced the long stretches of straight roads, the seemingly endless flat horizon and the huge open sky. I sketched and took lots of photos around some of the towns for reference. I also collected samples of dirt, grasses and leaves.

**Tell us about your illustration style and colour palette in this book.**

My illustrations for *Mallee Sky* are oil paintings with some of the pencil/charcoal sketch showing through underneath. I used contrasting colours to reflect the change in mood and emotion throughout the book. Pinky browns and warm greys for dry dusty landscape in drought are then contrasted with bright greens once the rains come and bring life back to the landscape, farms and towns.

**How is the experience of illustrating a picture book different to your other work?**

When I paint for an exhibition – the artworks might be related loosely by theme or style, but for my illustrations I have to consider continuity (of character or environment) and sequence. The book illustrations are viewed together as a complete body of work and held in the hand – closer to the viewer. Paintings from my exhibitions are sold individually and each one is hung on a wall on its own viewed independently from the rest of the series.





# questions & activities

## BEFORE READING

What do you know about The Mallee? Where is it? What does it look like? Why do you think Jodi Toering and Tannya Harricks have created a book about it? Revisit these questions after reading the book and see if your answers change.

Look at the front cover and read the blurb on the back. Try to predict some of the events that might happen in the story.

## ENGLISH

Authors and illustrators can use a number of methods to show the emotions their characters feel; and to inspire certain emotions in readers. Examine the following spreads and ask how are characters' emotions conveyed in the text and illustration? Does the text give more information than the illustration, or vice versa? What emotion does this spread make you feel as the reader?

- "More stars shine over the Mallee ..."
- "Day after day, Dad stands on the verandah ..."
- "But one day, we hear a sound ..."
- "The whole school stops and runs outside ..."

What is the purpose of *Mallee Sky* (i.e. to entertain, to inform or to persuade)? How can you tell? Does it have more than one purpose? What might be different about the book if it was created with a different purpose?

Who do you think the main character of the story is? Why? It can be argued that the real character of *Mallee Sky* is the land itself. Discuss.

Jodi Toering grew up in Beulah which makes up part of the Mallee. How do you think her experience living in this area might have inspired this story? Is the setting of *Mallee Sky* similar or different to where you live? How? Using the first few spreads of the book as a guide, write a paragraph describing where you live. Consider the common animals and plants, what the buildings look like, the weather, etc.

Jodi Toering uses many adjectives throughout *Mallee Sky*, for example: "The unforgiving sun" and "the inky sky". How do these adjectives enhance the text? Identify other interesting adjectives in the text and suggest some other words that could be used in their place.

Personification is when you give human qualities or abilities to an object or animal. Find examples of personification in the book and discuss why you think Jodi Toering used this device.

Some examples for students to find include:

- "The unforgiving sun ..."
- "... the scrub sighs, still and thirsty."
- "... Dad stands on the verandah, scanning the selfish blue for signs of rain."

Metaphors are tools authors use to make their descriptions more interesting for readers. Metaphor is when one thing is said to be something that it isn't. For example, "When the sun goes down, the red heat of the day bleeds into the sky and sets it on fire." Find other examples of metaphor in *Mallee Sky*.

Who is the narrator of this story? What do we know about him from the text and illustrations? What can you assume about him?



Discuss the words “hope” and “resilience”. What do they mean? How are they demonstrated in *Mallee Sky*?

What have you learned from reading *Mallee Sky* that you didn't know before?

How does the author use imagery to create a picture in the reader's mind? Find examples in the text.

Demonstrate the effect of the writing devices that Jodi Toering uses by rewriting some of the text removing adjectives, personification, metaphors, imagery, etc. For example “In the morning, baby galas croak in hollows of cast gums. The unforgiving sun that ripens the crops beats down early in the Mallee.” could be rewritten as “In the morning there are birds in the trees. The sun shines in the Mallee.” Compare and contrast the two quotes, discussing how each makes the reader feel, what they imagine when reading each and which is more enjoyable to read.

## VISUAL ARTS

Tannya Harricks created the illustrations in *Mallee Sky* with oil paint. Recreate one of the illustrations or create an original of your own using a different medium, such as watercolour paint, coloured pencil, charcoal, digital art, collage, etc.

The illustrations not only interpret the text, but extend the story by giving the reader more information. Choose a spread and discuss what information is in the illustrations that are not in the text.

What colour palette has Tannya Harricks used in her illustrations? How do these colours change throughout the book (i.e. vibrant reds and yellows for the sunset, rich dark blue for the night sky, changing into browns and oranges for the middle of the book during the drought, grey/blue for the rain and bright green for the growing crops). Why do you think the colour palette changes throughout the book? Find a colour ad in a magazine or newspaper. Discuss how colour is used. Re-create the ad using a different colour scheme and discuss how the meaning of the ad changes with a different colour scheme.

From memory, draw a picture of a local park or grassy/bushy area of your school. What colours did you use for the sky, grass, trees, etc.? Go for a walk around that area and make notes on all the colours you see – did any surprise you?

## HASS - GEOGRAPHY

The Australian Electoral Commission defines geographic boundaries of The Mallee here: <https://www.aec.gov.au/profiles/vic/mallee.htm>. Find this area in an atlas, a globe or Google Maps. How close or far is it to where you live?

What are the remarkable features of The Mallee according to this book? Research the area in your school library and online to find other noteworthy facts about the area.



“People pass on, too. They drift away beyond the clouds in the bright blue Mallee sky.”

Why does the drought cause people to move away? What needs are not being met that forces people to leave?

What steps can you, your family or school take to support people in drought-affected areas? Think of both water conservation and charity.

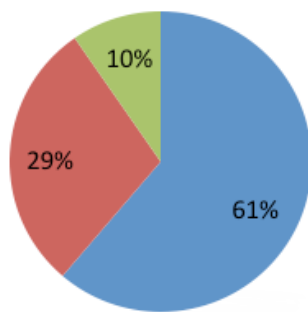
## HASS - SCIENCE

What is drought? How does drought affect people and animals? Consider the immediate effects, such as drinking water and food for wildlife and farm animals, failed crops meaning no income for farmers; and larger effects such as a lower supply of farmed fruit, vegetables and meat.

Keep a rain record in your classroom. Create a calendar and record whether or not it rained each day for a month – this can be tailored to ability level, i.e. recordings can be just yes/no, or they can be on a scale. At the end of the month, compile your findings into a pie chart or column graph to display the data, for example:

### Amount of Rain

■ No Rain ■ Light Rain ■ Heavy Rain



“Absent birds slowly return to make homes in their branches once more.”

Why have the birds been absent? Where might they have gone?

The farmer in this story grows barley and wheat. What are these crops used for?

Drought can be considered a natural disaster. What are some other natural disasters? Has your local area ever experienced a natural disaster? How did it affect the community?

## FURTHER ACTIVITIES

Return to the mind-map the class created before reading the book. Cross off or edit any points that are incorrect then add any new information that you have learned.

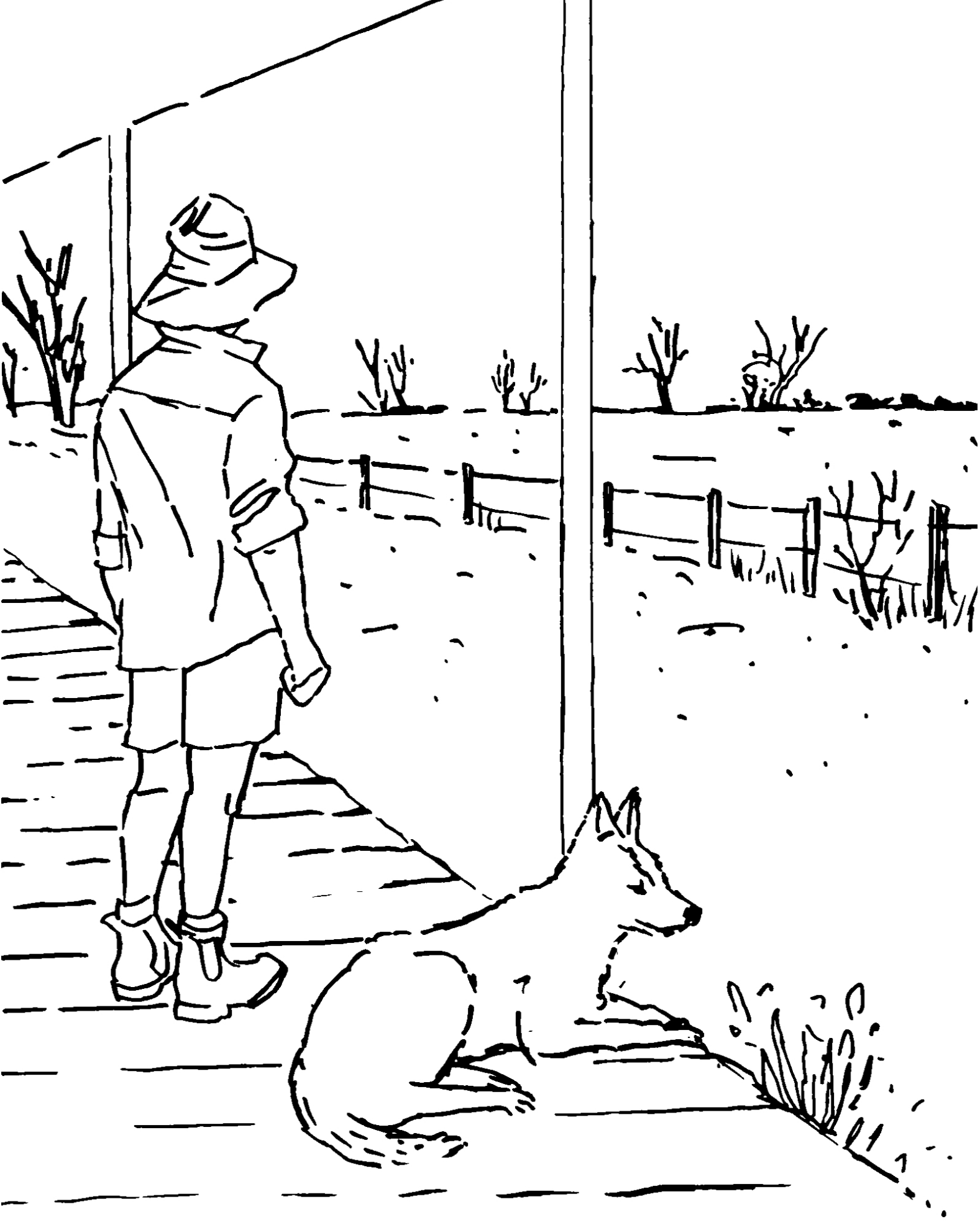
*Mallee Sky* vocab list – learn the spelling and definition of the following words found in the book:

- Vast
- Eerie
- Parched
- Wither
- Unrelenting
- Leaden
- Absent

Use the activity sheet on the following page as a colouring sheet or a base for a collage. Experiment with different colours, mediums and materials to create a vibrant Mallee sky.







Mallee Sky

by Jodi Toering

illustrated by Tannya Harricks

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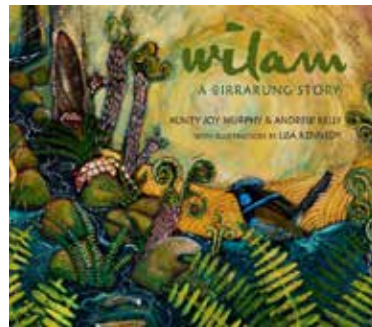


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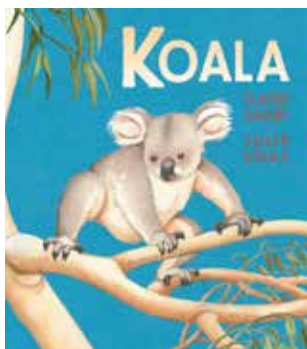
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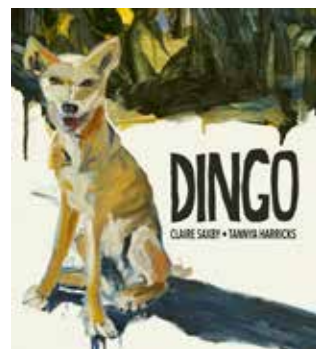
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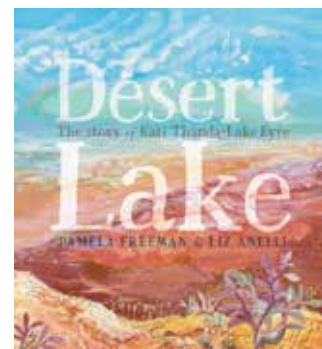
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