

ARE WE THERE YET?

By Alison Lester

Are we there yet?
Teachers' Notes written by Linnet Hunter and Tami-Jo Richter.

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All activities are devised for levels 3-6 (Mid to upper primary) and are arranged in order of difficulty.

Central Idea

This is the story of a journey

Teacher Guiding Question

How is our individuality expressed through our creation of memories?

Student Guiding Question

How do we tell stories about our journeys?

LANGUAGE: Stories through writing

Teaching Objective: to examine the journey as a narrative technique to model story writing beginning/middle /end.

A journey around Australia

Discussion

- What does a journey mean to you?
- What kinds of journeys can you think of?
- What heroic journeys do you know about?

- Why do people ride bikes across the desert or run long distances?
- What is your favourite kind of journey?
- This story begins and ends in the same place. What does home mean to you?

Writing

- This is the story of a journey. What are the main parts of a story like this? Where does it start and end? What happens in the middle?
- Have you been somewhere with your family? What were the main parts of that journey - it can be a picnic, going to the football ...
- On 3X4 index cards write down the name of each person in your family story. Draw each person/character in the story - (the people in your family who went with you), don't forget to include yourself!
- Look closely at the writing. How does Alison Lester tell the story without being boring? What kinds of sentences does she use to make it move along?
- List some ways she starts her sentences instead of using 'and then we went...' over and over. For example *we made, we saw, I waved, It took...*
- What repeated phrases are used? (*Are we there yet?*) How do they add to the story?
- Move your cards along on a journey and write about where the characters are going and what they see. Try to start your sentences like Alison Lester did. You could write some things each person might say on the back of each card.
- Another way to tell a story is act it out. Create a short radio script from a section of the book and act it out with a small group. Use phrases and lines from the book and invent some of your own!
- Pretend you are Grace or another member of the family and write a postcard home to Nan telling her all about what you have seen.

- What kinds of songs do people sing while travelling? What games do they play in the car to make the time pass? In a small group make a collection of the best ones and make them into a booklet.

VISUAL LITERACY: Stories through pictures

Teaching Objective: to enhance understanding of how narrative can be created pictorially

Are we there yet?

- Look closely at one double page spread of the book. What different kinds of pictures do you notice? What order do you 'read' them in?
- Which kinds of story pictures are most important in this book? Look at the maps, diagrams, and drawings of a single object. How do they all combine together?
- Collect a series of different kinds of pictures from magazines. Make sure you have diagrams, cartoons, and photos.
- Arrange them into a pattern over an A3 page. Rearrange them until you think you can see a story pattern. Give your page to your partner. Ask your partner to tell you what story they can read. Write down on the page what your partner has said. Did they find a different story from the one you thought of? Why might this happen?
- Draw a cartoon of two of the characters from the book. Make speech bubbles come out of their mouths telling part of the conversation shown in the book. Where does the writing have to go so the reader will read it in the right order?
- Choose your favourite page. What do you notice about the illustrations on this page? How do they make you feel? What colours and shapes has Alison Lester used to give you that feeling? What is special about this page for you?
- Alison Lester uses cross-sections or cutaways to help you look inside the caravan. She labels some of her drawings too. Create a cross section of

your bedroom so that the viewer can see inside your drawers. Make funny labels to explain what can be found underneath your bed!

SCIENCE: Understanding through stories

Teaching Objective: to look at flora and fauna of Australia by region

- Make a felt fuzzy board of Australian animals by cutting out photos of animals and birds and reptiles and sticking felt or velcro onto the back so they can be attached to a map of Australia copied onto felt.
- How can some animals live happily in the desert?
- What features do they have to help them do this?
- People travel a long distance to watch whales and dolphins. Why might this be so?
- Make a board game of a journey around a region or state, which shows where the different animals and plants in Australia live - if you get bitten by a red back you may have to go back to the start (that is hospital!).

GEOGRAPHY/MATHS: Stories through mapping

Teaching Objective: to enable students to calculate and use the measuring skills involved in mapping.

- Draw a picture map of where you are right now. Pin all the maps to the wall. In what ways are they similar? How are they different?
- Go for a class walk and then map your journey after you return to school.
- How might you work out how far the family travelled on their journey?
- Why might some maps in the book be coloured in and others have white space?
- Draw a map of your street, showing your house as special.
- Draw a simple map explaining to someone how to get to the local milk bar or shop from your house. How will you let them know how far it is? You could use a dotted line to show your usual route.

- Create a graph to show the different kinds of weather the family encountered.

IT: Stories through technology

Teaching Objective: to use technology to help present different places to readers.

- Choose a place you would like to visit in Australia, and create a travel brochure for it using a template from Word. Your audience/ readers are students of your own age. Try to make the destination as attractive to them as possible.
- Create a PowerPoint presentation of your favourite journey.
- Ask your teacher to help you meet a pen pal from a school a long distance away from you in another part of Australia.

ART: Cultural stories

Teaching Objective: to look at landscape through artistic cultural icons.

- Rock Art - at Kakadu Grace and her family are shown the rock art. What is this and why was it made? What stories are told through this art?
- Look at the colours Alison Lester has used in her illustrations to recreate the colours she saw on her journey. Which ones are most striking? Are they realistic? How have other artists drawn and coloured the outback?
- Make a collection of different representations of our countryside from different centuries. Compare how artists of different times recreated the landscape through art works. What stories about how they felt about Australia can you find?
- How many symbols can you find throughout the illustrations which are connected to our Australian heritage? (eg Ned Kelly)
- Create an artwork which reflects what you find important and/or special about our country.

- Look at some other picture books which represent Australian landscapes. What do you notice about them? Do they have anything in common? Compare them with some European and English picture books. Do you notice anything about the way the land and sky are shown in these books? Why might there be a difference?

Examples of Australian picture books that reflect the landscape:

Fox, Margaret Wild, ill. Ron Brooks. Allen & Unwin 1864484659 Hb 1864489332 Pb

Papunya School Book of Country and History, Papunya School, Allen & Unwin, 186508526X Hb 1865085251 Pb

When I was Little Like You, Mary Malbunka, 1865089036

Both picture books depict a central Australian landscape from both an historical and present perspective.

Lizzie Nonsense (2004) Jan Ormerod, Little Hare

Set in the south west of Western Australia in the late 19th century, Jan Ormerod pays homage to the impressionist artists of the period in her picture book about an isolated family waiting for father to return from delivering sandlewood.

Sand Swimmers, the Secret Life of Australia's Dead Heart, Narelle Oliver. 0734403178 Pb

A wonderful evocation of the central Australian desert regions with the added bonus of a parallel story describing Charles Sturt's journey to find an inland sea.

Australian Journeys

Highway (1998) Nadia Wheatley, ill. Andrew McLean. Omnibus Books, 1862913064 Pb

On Our Way to the Beach (2004) Sofie Laguna, ill. Andrew McLean. Omnibus Books 1862915016 Hb

Tumbled into a van, a country family make their way to the beach - which the children have never seen - with many overnight stops on the way.

No Place Like Home, Colin Thompson, ill. Anna Pignataro. Out of print.

Each summer Big Jim is harnessed to the cart and the family acrobatics and magic show travels the country.

Great Ocean Walk (2003) Jiri Tibor Novak. Lothian Books, 0734405774 Hb

A father and son set out to walk the great ocean road in Victoria. Fantasy and family affection blend well.

Refugees (2004) David Miller. Lothian Books, 0734406339 Hb

An environmental picture book with cut paper collage illustrations that uses the plight of homeless ducks searching for a safe haven to highlight the universality of refugees of both the animal and human world.

Reggie, Queen of the Street (2003) Margaret Barbalet, ill. Andrew Mclean. Viking 0670040576

Reggie, a small dog, embarks on her journey to return home after the family have moved to another part of the city, only to find that home is where family and friends are.

Haven't included Possum Magic, The Way Home (Rodda) because they are probably too young for this age group.