

WEAVING COUNTRY Chris Joy • Aunty Kim Wandin • Ashleigh Pugh WALKER BOOKS

Written by
Chris Joy and Aunty Kim Wandin

Illustrations by
Ashleigh Pugh

TEACHER NOTES

Teacher Notes by Emily Barrow,
ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS VICTORIA

WALKER BOOKS



WEAVING COUNTRY
 CREATORS: CHRIS JOY &
 AUNTY KIM WANDIN (AUTHORS)
 ASHLEIGH PUGH (ILLUSTRATOR)
 ISBN 9781760657628 HARDBACK
 JULY 2025

About the book

‘Around and around they go,’ says Walert looking at Gugung’s hands turning the wheel of woven reeds, growing slowly and surely, bigger and bigger.

Walert's grandmother, Gugung, is collecting reeds (*djirra*) to weave a basket (*binak*) and finally, Walert is big enough to take part and learn this important cultural practice. But when a pair of blue wrens interrupt them, Walert realises that the birds have something to teach her, too.



Index

Introduction	3
Read the Book: Listening & Connecting to Country	4
Planting a Weaving Garden with Native Grasses	5
Weaving – Story, Skill & Connection	7
A Note on Inclusive Practice	9



About the Creators

Aunty Kim Wandin is a masterweaver and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elder. She lives in Healesville. Her traditional basket making has been handed down to her by direct lineage. Aunty Kim's work represents a significant cultural position within the south east of Victoria as part of an important group of arts practitioners.

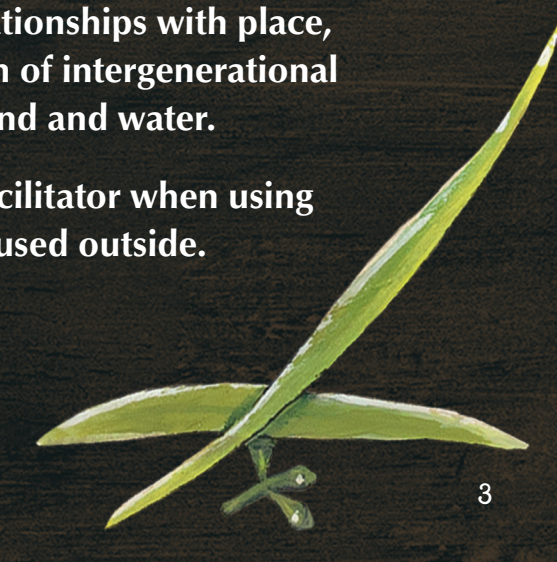
Chris Joy is a writer, artist and curator who is a full time creator of public art. She lives and works in the Yarra Valley, Victoria. Chris has developed many children's literature programs, events and exhibitions in cultural organisations and was on the design team for the award-winning Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Ashleigh Pugh is a descendant of Whadjuk ballardong, who has developed her own distinctive style of blending traditional wood burning technique with painting. In 2020, Ashleigh won Best Landscape for the Linden Art Gallery Postcard Prize.

Introduction

These teacher resources have been created to support meaningful outdoor learning experiences that foster connection to Country through weaving, storytelling, and deep listening. They are grounded in respect for the enduring cultural knowledge of the First Peoples of this land. The book was created and is set on Wurundjeri Country in the Yarra Valley, Victoria—where the Birrarung (Yarra River), the River of Mists, flows as a lifeforce from the Mountains to the Sea. The Birrarung is central to Wurundjeri identity, culture, and care for Country. These activities invite students to slow down, listen deeply, and build respectful relationships with place, themselves, and each other, honouring the wisdom of intergenerational learning and the living stories carried by land and water.

We encourage teachers to use Country as a co-facilitator when using these resources – they are designed to be used outside.



TEACHER NOTES

CURRICULUM LINKS

English (Literature; Literacy; Oral Language) • Science (Biological Sciences) • Humanities and Social Sciences (Civics and Citizenship) • The Arts (Visual Arts; Media Arts) • Health and Physical Education (Personal and Social Capability)

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIOTRITIES AND GAPABILITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures • Intercultural Understanding • Personal & Social Capacity • Sustainability • Critical and Creative Thinking • Ethical Understanding

THEMES

Connection to Country • Storytelling • Sustainability • Biodiversity • Identity • Belonging • Cultural Respect • Wellbeing • Intergenerational learning

Read the Book: Listening & Connecting to Country

FOCUS:

This session invites students to connect deeply with Country through stillness, observation, and creativity. Through reading or listening to the book *Weaving Country*, students will slow down, listen to the land, and express their experience through poetry and creative expression.

LEARNING INTENTIONS:

- To foster a mindful connection to Country (nature, the land, the environment) through sensory experiences
 - To explore nature's sounds and stories through creative expression
 - To develop respect and gratitude for the natural world
-

ACTIVITY FLOW:

Read the Book:

- Find a quiet space outside to read *Weaving Country*
- Question: How does the book *Weaving Country* connect you to land, time, or story?
- How does the story make you feel? Why?
- What were the sounds in the *Weaving Country* and who made them?
- Why do you think the authors focussed on the sounds that Country makes?
- Together, list the characters in the story...can the animals, plants, wind and sun be characters too? Why/why not? (There are no wrong or right answers here).

Lie Down & Listen (10 mins)

- Invite students to lie on their backs, eyes closed. Encourage them to:
 - Breathe deeply
 - Notice how the ground feels beneath them
 - Focus on the sounds around them—birds, wind, insects, distant voices
- Let them know this is a time to slow down and simply be with Country.

Sound Mapping (10 mins)

- Give students paper and pencils. Cardstock works well, or a clipboard with paper.
- Sit or lie still and draw a dot in the centre (representing themselves).
- For 5–10 minutes, listen deeply and mark on the page any sounds they hear—use shapes, words, or symbols to show what and where the sounds came from.

Poetry Writing – “What Country Said to Me” (15–20 mins)

- Use the sound map and weaving experience as inspiration.
 - Prompt: “If Country could speak, what would it say to you?”
 - Encourage free-form poems—no rules. Use repetition, sensory language, and emotion.
 - Students may write, draw, or perform their response.
-

Reflection Questions:

- How did it feel to slow down and listen to Country?
 - What surprised you in the sounds or feelings you noticed?
-

Extension Ideas:

- Return to the same spot through the seasons and track changes in sound and feeling.

Planting a Weaving Garden with Native Grasses

OVERVIEW:

This session invites students to connect deeply with Country through stillness, observation, and creativity. Through reading or listening to the book *Weaving Country*, students will slow down, listen to the land, and express their experience through poetry and creative expression.

KEY LEARNING AREAS:

- Science (Biological Sciences, Living Things and their Habitats)
- Visual Arts (Textiles, Natural Materials)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Sustainability and Wellbeing

Planting Native Grasses:

Choose hardy, local native grasses traditionally used for weaving by First Nations peoples. These are low-maintenance and well-suited to Australian climates. Contact your local council or Indigenous Nursery for information on which plants are local to your area.

Recommended grasses:

- ***Lomandra longifolia* (Spiny-headed Mat-rush):** Ideal for weaving and very hardy. (In the book, this grass is named karawan). It is also a bush food (seeds and leaf base) and attracts butterflies.
 - ***Themeda triandra* (Kangaroo Grass):** Attractive reddish seed heads, great for habitat. Seeds are a food source.
 - ***Poa labillardierei* (Common Tussock Grass):** Provides dense cover and nesting material. A home for soil invertebrates living at the root base.
 - ***Dianella species* (e.g., Flax-lily):** Adds purple-blue flowers and edible berries.
-

Creating Habitat:

Native grasses create a micro-habitat for:

- Small birds like wrens and finches (for nesting and seed foraging)
- Beneficial insects such as native bees, ladybirds, and butterflies
- Invertebrates like spiders, beetles, and worms that enrich soil health and support the food web

Healthy grass systems also support ecological health by stabilising soil, preventing erosion, and improving water retention. The dense root networks feed and protect soil biota—the microbes, fungi, and tiny animals that are essential for nutrient cycling and plant growth.

Tips:

- Plant in clumps or swathes, or a layered mix for shelter and diversity
 - Avoid pesticides; let natural predators manage pests
 - Include logs, stones, and leaf litter nearby for additional habitat
-

Weaving Connection:

Once mature, grasses can be harvested sustainably for weaving projects. Introduce traditional weaving practices respectfully, ideally with guidance from a local Indigenous educator or Elder to deepen cultural understanding.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

- Map birds and insects observed over time
- Create small woven items (e.g. bracelets, baskets)
- Research traditional uses of plants by First Nations peoples
- Watch the wind move through the grasses or the sun shining on it. Write a poem to describe how these observations make you feel

How does Gugung care for and prepare the reeds for harvesting and weaving? Do you recognise any of the other plants in *Weaving Country*?

Does anyone in your family weave? Invite them to school to tell your class about their weaving. Ask them why they weave, what they make and where they harvest their plants from.

Find out what other materials can be used for weaving. In some countries plastic and old clothes can be repurposed to weave into baskets. Ask your art teacher to assist the class to create a large 2D or 3D group weaving.

Weaving – Story, Skill & Connection

OVERVIEW:

Weaving is a deeply cultural and spiritual practice for many First Nations peoples across Australia, and the world. More than a craft, weaving is a way of passing down knowledge, stories, and connection to Country through generations. It is a cultural practice grounded in care, patience, and relationship. Introducing students to traditional weaving helps them explore cultural heritage, sustainable practices, and respectful learning from Elders and community.

Key Learning Areas:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
 - Visual Arts (Textile Practices, Cultural Expression)
 - Civics and Citizenship (Respect, Community)
 - Intercultural Capability
 - English (Oral Language and Storytelling)
-

LEARNING FOCUS:

- Experience the importance of slowing down, being present, and connecting to Country through mindful weaving practices, supporting emotional regulation and a sense of wellbeing
 - Understand the cultural significance of weaving in First Nations communities
 - Explore how knowledge is passed through oral storytelling and hands-on practice
 - Engage with intergenerational learning by listening to stories and learning from Elders or cultural educators
 - Develop appreciation for sustainable use of natural materials
-

TEACHING IDEAS:

Weaving Country: How do the authors and illustrator represent the passing on of knowledge from Gugung to Walert in the story? Find the page of the weaving circle, which is a giant spiral connecting past generations and spiralling into the future.

Material Walk: Find out which native plants have been traditionally used in weaving in your local area. Contact your local Aboriginal community organisations, local council, or Indigenous nurseries for support. Organise a walking excursion to a local park or waterway to observe the plants growing on Country. Research plant use (food, fibre, medicines)

Cultural Immersion Session: Invite a local First Nations weaver or Elder to demonstrate weaving and share personal or cultural stories behind their practice.

Weaving Circle: Create an outside, shared weaving space where students learn basic weaving techniques while sharing their own stories or reflections.

Intergenerational Story Threads: Encourage students to reflect on what it means to learn from someone older or more experienced, and how stories are remembered and retold. Ask students what they have learned from their Elders? Is there something they would like to pass on to younger generations when they become an Elder?

What are your favourite ways of being taught or learning (outside/inside, alone/with others, screen/books, with family/at school, sitting/moving), quiet/noisy...?

Pair student responses with written or oral narratives or a drawing —real or imagined—that represent connection to people, place, or memory.

Cultural Connections:

- Weaving is often gendered, seasonal, and place-specific, with styles and methods varying across nations.
- It is a practice of listening, patience, and respect, often shared in circle—a symbol of equality and continuity. How does Gugung let Walert know when there is something important to learn? Gugung teaches Walert how important it is to listen deeply, to watch carefully and sometimes, to wait for the right time. What can help you learn new things?

IMPORTANT NOTES FOR TEACHERS:

- Always engage with local Aboriginal community members or organisations before teaching cultural practices.
- Ensure cultural safety and integrity by seeking permission and guidance for any traditional methods or stories shared.
- Use this as an opportunity to celebrate living cultures, not just historical practices.

EXTENSION IDEAS:

- Host a family weaving day with students, parents, and community members
- Connect weaving to seasonal changes
- Create a class mural where each student adds a piece that represents knowledge and culture being passed on through generations. (Note, in the book the illustrations represent the circular motions of weaving)

A Note on Inclusive Practice

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR ALL LEARNERS

Outdoor, sensory-based activities like lying down and weaving can be deeply calming—but they may also feel unfamiliar or unsettling for some students, especially those with trauma backgrounds, sensory sensitivities, or neurodiverse experiences. Here's how to gently support all learners:

Build Cultural Safety

Acknowledge the unceded Aboriginal land you're learning on. Invite students to reflect respectfully on how First Nations peoples have listened to and cared for Country for thousands of years. Where possible, consult or include a local Elder or Aboriginal educator to guide the activity and ensure cultural integrity.

Offer Choice & Control

Let students choose how they participate. For example:

- "You're welcome to lie down and close your eyes, or you can sit and keep your eyes open if that feels better for you."
 - "If weaving doesn't feel right today, you're welcome to observe, sketch, or do gentle breathing."
-

Use Predictable, Calming Language

Begin by explaining what the activity will involve, step by step.

Use soft, grounding language like:

- "We'll take some quiet time to listen to the world around us. There's no right or wrong—just noticing."
 - "You are safe here. You don't have to share anything personal, just what you feel comfortable with."
-

Support Regulation & Engagement

Some students may need movement or grounding. Offer options:

- Standing and stretching before lying down
- Holding a smooth stone or sensory object during quiet time
- Provide visual or tactile prompts for poetry writing (e.g. word cards, natural object inspirations)



**WALKER
BOOKS
CLASSROOM**



Free education resources written
to the Australian curriculum.

classroom.walkerbooks.com.au