

WONGUTHA TALES:

Bawoo Stories & Badudu Stories

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YEAR LEVEL: Y2-5

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

ABOUT THE BOOK

Four wonderful traditional teaching stories of the Wongutha people plus stories of May O'Brien's early life as a Mission child are collected here for a new generation of junior readers.

First published as individual titles in 1992, May O'Brien's stories were ground-breaking publications, presenting traditional Indigenous stories in a bilingual text and giving a unique insight into learning English as a second language from a First Nations perspective. The stories are still as fresh and appealing as ever and May's simple pronunciation guide for Wongutha words are perfect learning activities for the classroom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

May O'Brien was born in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia, and at the age of five, was taken to Mount Margaret Mission where she spent the next twelve years. She taught in Western Australian rural and metropolitan primary schools for twenty-five years. May served in a number of other positions before being appointed Superintendent of Aboriginal Education, a position she held until her early retirement in 1988.

THEMES

- Identity
- Culture
- Country
- Wongutha language
- Australian history
- English and an additional language
- Growing up
- School
- Friendship
- Pride
- Obedience
- Native flora and fauna

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y2-5 English

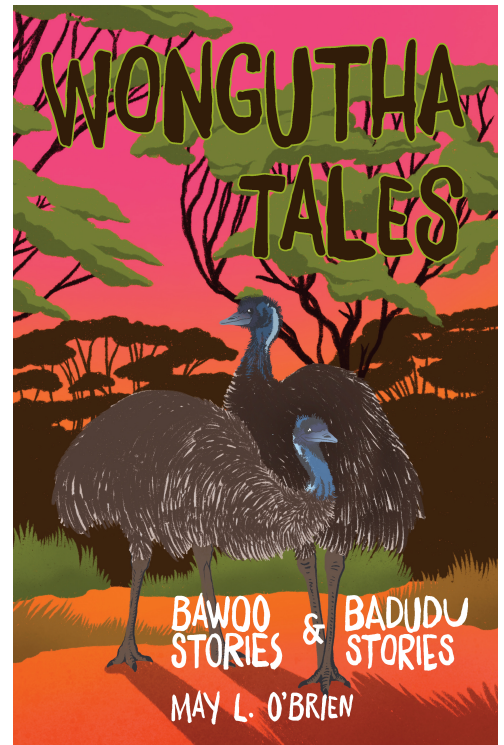
Y2-5 Humanities and Social Sciences

Y2-5 Science

Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Aboriginal fire management: <https://landcareaustralia.org.au/project/traditional-aboriginal-burning-modern-day-land-management/>



CLASSROOM IDEAS

General discussion questions

1. Where do these stories take place? Locate the region on a map of Australia. What are the main towns on this land today?
2. Wongutha is one of hundreds of Aboriginal languages and dialects once spoken in Australia. What is the traditional language of the land on which you live?
3. Listen to a brief audio recording of someone speaking in a language you don't know. How did it make you feel when you couldn't understand what was being said? List the emotions you felt.
4. Why did the teachers at the Mount Margaret Mission allow students to speak Wongutha outside of school?
5. Try to read some of the phrases in the Wongutha pronunciation guide on pages 88–90. Did you find it challenging? Why do you think the author chose to include Wongutha words and phrases in the book?
6. The eight stories in this collection are divided into two collections: Bawoo Stories and Badudu Stories. Briefly summarise what each collection is about. What is the significance of the title of each collection?
7. Why do you think May O'Brien chose to dedicate the Bawoo Stories to the Wongutha elders? (p. 7) Who are the Badudu Stories dedicated to?
8. Wongutha tales are traditionally told, rather than written. Why do you think the author chose to write and publish these stories?
9. Which of the Wongutha tales was your favourite? Who was your favourite character? Which character is most like you?

Discussion questions specific to stories within the collection

Bawoo Stories:

How Crows Became Black

1. How are the crows in the story different to today's crows? How are they similar?
2. Why didn't the other animals like the crows? Why didn't the Wongutha people like the crows?
3. What can you learn about the Wongutha way of living from this story (i.e., food, cooking, ceremonies, fire)?
4. How do you think the crows felt waiting for the fire? (p. 16) How do you think they felt afterwards?
5. Do you think the crows were right to change themselves to try and fit in?
6. Explain what reason is given in the story for:
 - a. the crows being black
 - b. crows not living in large groups
 - c. salt lakes and salt bushes being part of the landscape
 - d. small birds chasing crows

Why the Emu Can't Fly

1. Before reading the story, predict why the emus can't fly.
2. What is 'vanity'? (p. 20)
3. What type/s of birds do you think the small birds in the story could be?
4. Why did the emus think they were better than the other birds? How did they show this?
5. Do you think the other animals should have helped the birds? Why/why not?
6. What different approaches were used to try and stop the emus bullying? Which approach was most effective?
7. Were you satisfied with this story's ending? Do you think the emus deserved their punishment?

The Kangaroos Who Wanted to be People

1. Have you ever seen a kangaroo in the wild? Describe how it acted.
2. This story helps explain why some places or areas are out of bounds for children. Are there any areas you're not allowed to go? List some reasons why you wouldn't be allowed in an area.
3. Can you think of any stories from your own culture that encourage children to follow the rules?
4. How did the men prepare for their ceremony in the cave? What made the cave a special place?
5. Why do you think the kangaroos wanted to be like the people? Have you ever wanted to be like a group or another person?
6. What was the kangaroos' punishment? Do you think the punishment was fair?

Barn-Barn Barlala, the Bush Trickster

1. What is a 'trickster'? Can you think of any synonyms?
2. How did the children know the berries were ripe?
3. What type of bird do you think Barn-Barn Barlala is? Search online to listen to a bellbird's call.
4. How do you think the children felt when they realised they were lost? How do you think the family and friends felt?
5. What lessons do you think are learned by the children in the story?
6. What can you learn about bush survival from this story? What can you learn about tracking?

Badudu Stories:

Smartie Pants

1. Landy is excited when he achieves his goal of learning enough English to be able to join the football team. When have you persevered with a goal and how did you feel when you achieved it?
2. What does it mean to be a 'good sport'? (p. 58) What examples from the story show someone being a good sport? What examples show someone not being a good sport?
3. The author uses Landy's body movements and sensations to show how he is feeling at different points in the story. What movement or sensation shows Landy is excited (p. 55–57), mad (p. 58), confused (p. 58), proud (p. 60)?
4. How are the teachers portrayed in this story? Use quotes from the story to support your opinion.
5. Plot the main events of this story on a story mountain or story map. What is the main complication and resolution?
6. What do you think is the main message of this story?

What Do You Say?

1. Buruwan doesn't understand what 'most improved' means (p.63). What is your understanding of this phrase?
2. Summarise the misunderstanding between Buruwan and Miss Jones in 2-4 sentences.
3. With a partner, act out the after-school scene between Buruwan and Miss Jones (p. 65-68).
4. Why does the pencil box mean so much to Buruwan?
5. How does Violet help Buruwan?
6. Do you think Miss Jones will give Buruwan the pencil case in the end?

Which Jack?

1. Before reading the story, make a prediction based on the title *Which Jack?*
2. Why do you think Wanu and Miyarn felt happiest when speaking Wongi together? (p. 72)
3. What are three words you would use to describe Mr Jackson?
4. Do you think Wanu and Miyarn's English will continue to improve? Why/why not?
5. Give an example from the story of someone acting as a supportive friend and an example of someone doing the opposite.
6. Use each of these words from the story in a sentence: *bonnet* (p. 72), *jack* (p. 73), *scrambled* (p. 73), *knock-off* (p. 74), *puzzled* (p.74), *nudged* (p. 75).

Too Big for Your Boots

1. Before reading the story, explain what it means to be 'too big for your boots'. What does it mean to be a 'busybody'?
2. Bindabinda's classmates use body language to show sympathy by pushing their lips back and forth (p. 77). How would you convey this to a friend without speaking?
3. Do you think Mr Walker meant to cause Bindabinda so much distress? What do you think he might do differently next time?
4. Why did Matron Murray laugh softly when Bindabinda told her about her feet (p. 83)?
5. What message could a student learn from this story? What message could a teacher learn?

Creative Writing

1. Consider the morals or lessons of the Bawoo Stories. Write a short story that explores one of the same morals or lessons, but is set in the modern day.
2. 'Smartie pants' (p. 58) is an idiom; a phrase where the meaning is not the same as the meaning of the words. Landy misunderstands what the Laverton kids mean when they call him 'smartie pants'. Make a list of idioms, then create a three-panel comic showing someone misunderstanding one of the idioms.
3. Imagine you are a character from one of the Badudu stories. Write a paragraph describing the Mount Margaret Mission from your point of view.
4. Write an informative news article about the football match from *Smartie Pants*. Remember to include the five Ws – who, what, when, where, why.
5. Retell one of the stories in your own words.
6. Reread the description of the fire from *How Crows Became Black* (p. 17). List the descriptive words and phrases used, then use some of those words and phrases in a poem about fire.

Science

1. What features made the Eastern Goldfields a good habitat for the crows in *How Crows Became Black*?
2. Research the emu life cycle. Create a poster or multimedia presentation to share your findings.
3. Choose an animal that features in one of the Bawoo Stories. Draw a picture of the animal and label the adaptations or features that allow it to survive in the arid landscape of the Eastern Goldfields.
4. What is an ecosystem? In what ways do the people and animals in the Bawoo Stories interact with each other? How do they maintain balance in the ecosystem? What happens when the ecosystem is disrupted?
5. Ochre is mentioned in the story *The Kangaroos Who Wanted to be People* (p. 33). What is ochre and where does it come from? What is it used for in the story?
6. Barn-Barn Barlala uses his call to confuse the children (p. 45). Can you think of any other animals that use their sound, colour or body to confuse other animals? What is the purpose of this confusion?
7. List the animals that feature in the Bawoo Stories. Look online to discover the conservation status of each animal.

HASS

1. Why were the Bawoo Stories handed down from generation to generation? Do you know any other stories from other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander groups?
2. Discuss the historical context of the Mount Margaret Mission (p. 50–51). What were the Stolen Generations? What was a mission? Why did the children in the stories live at the Mission?
3. Which countries around the world have English as the primary language? What do these countries have in common? Does each country speak English the same way?
4. Use the information on pages 86–87, as well as your own research, to create a biographical poster about author May L. O'Brien.
5. Some of the misunderstandings in the Badudu stories come from cultural differences, such as the teacher expecting Buruwan to say 'thank you' in *What Do You Say?* Have you ever experienced a cultural misunderstanding? What happened?
6. In *The Kangaroos Who Wanted to Become People*, the kangaroos say, 'we must learn how to make a fire too' (p. 34). What can fire be used for? Why is it important for survival in the bush?
7. Aboriginal fire management practices are beginning to be adopted across Australia. What does this involve and what are some of the benefits?
8. In *The Kangaroos Who Wanted to be People*, the men visit a special cave that was painted by their ancestors (p. 35). Are there any places that are special to your family? What makes them significant?
9. How do you think the lives of Wongutha people are different today to the time when the Badudu Stories are set (mid-1900s). How do you think they are the same?