

## THE BOAB TREE

HELEN MILROY

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YEAR LEVEL: Y3–6

### ABOUT THE BOOK

A beautiful story about the journey of a boab nut trying to find its way home, as well as the difficulties it faces and the friendships it forms along the way.

Little Boab is lost and far, far from home. Surrounded by tall, unfriendly trees, he feels all alone. But the friendship of some small forest dwellers gives him hope. With a little luck, some clever planning and the help of his new friends, Boab might just find his way back to country.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helen Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She was born and educated in Perth. Helen has always had a passionate interest in health and wellbeing, especially for children. Helen studied medicine at the University of Western Australia. She is currently a professor at UWA, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Board Member with Beyond Blue and the AFL's first Indigenous Commissioner.

### THEMES

- The importance and power of friendships
- Everyone is important
- Resilience
- The Stolen Generations
- Life cycles

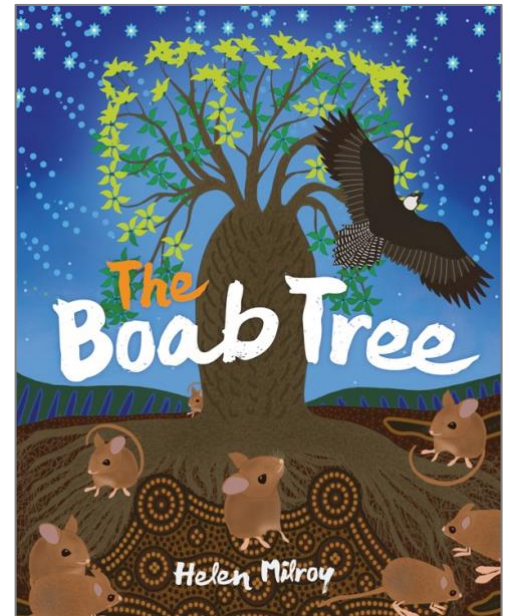
### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES Y3–6

- English
- Text Structure and organisation
- Punctuation
- How punctuation works to perform different functions in a text

See end of document for detailed information on curriculum outcomes.

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: [helenmilroy.com](http://helenmilroy.com)
- Western Australian Curriculum: [k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/teaching/curriculum-browser](http://k10outline.scsa.wa.edu.au/home/teaching/curriculum-browser)



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Vocabulary

- Explore 10 of the following words and explain their meaning in the context of the book:
  - tall and proud: '**A large family of boab trees stood tall and proud ...**'
  - bearing witness: '**Best of all however, was bearing witness to the arrival ...**'
  - ensure: '**... which would ensure the trees' survival forever.**'
  - splendour: '**They were magnificent in their splendour reaching far into the sky.**'
  - skimmed: '**As the eagle skimmed across the treetops ...**'
  - canopy: '**... the Boab rolled off the eagle's back and into the canopy of leaves.**'
  - familiar: '**Boab looked around but nothing was familiar.**'
  - curious: '**The mice were ever so curious.**'
  - common language: '**They told Boab that hopping mice throughout the land shared a common language ...**'
  - relieved: '**Boab was ... relieved to be able to tell his story ...**'
  - wither away: '**... otherwise he would wither away.**'
  - frenetic activity: '**One day there was a lot of frenetic activity amongst the small forest animals.**'
  - reassured: '**... but the mice reassured him ...**'

### Discussion questions

- The dedication in the book is 'For all our Stolen Children'. Research the Stolen Children and discuss any similarities you can find between them and the story of the boab tree.
- The author writes about the boab trees as if they were people. In the story they can think, sing and have emotions. This is known as personification, where human qualities are given to non-human things, like animals and objects. Why do you think the author does that?
- The mice have a very valuable message to share with the reader. They tell Boab that, '**We are all important**'. The mice recognise the importance of their role, even though they are very small in comparison to the tall trees. What role do the mice play in keeping the forest floor healthy?
- Think about yourself and the children of today; you are also important.
  - What role do you think you have that is significant and makes you special? Consider not only the things that you do today, but something you may do in the future.
  - Is it true to say, 'Our children are the future'?
- What strategy does the author use to show the reader how patient Boab and the mice have to be at times in the story?

### Creative writing

- In the story, the author names animals that can be found in Australia, and they all play a part in helping Boab to get home (eagle, hopping mice, dingo, osprey, possum, kangaroo, cockatoo and crow).
  - Choose an animal that can be found in Australia and write an information text about it. Include a description of its appearance, its habitat and any special characteristics that help it survive. Include an annotated picture or diagram to accompany your writing.
  - This can be made into a classroom display of Australian animals and their habitats.
  - Choose an iconic animal from Australia and write a narrative about an adventure where it 'saves the day'. Use personification and include a description of the animal that not only describes its appearance, but also gives the reader an insight into what the animal is like, e.g. 'He was a kind-hearted possum who loved to make sure no one was ever left out or felt lonely.'
- There is a lot of descriptive writing in the story, with adjectives and adverbs used to great effect. For example: '**That night, the storm came with a fury. The winds blew fiercely and the rain fell heavily all over the forest.**' Practise using adverbs in pairs. The starting sentence should be simple, e.g. 'The girl/boy walked down the street'.
- Students take turns saying the sentence and changing it each time by adding a different adverb, e.g. 'The girl walked quickly/slowly/noisily/carefully down the street.' This can also be done outside with the students throwing a small ball between them each time they say the sentence.
  - The students then edit their narrative by adding adverbs to their sentences.

## The Arts

1. Leaf rubbings. This is done by placing a leaf under a piece of paper and rubbing over it with the side of a crayon.
  - a. Students can do some leaf-rubbing backgrounds for their tree or life-cycle diagrams.
  - b. Experiment with different colours and using different pressures to get the best effect.

## Physical Education

1. Stuck in the mud game:  
One student is 'it'. When they tag another student, that student stands still with their legs and arms out, like branches of a tree. The tagged student cannot move until another student crawls between their legs, or some other agreed action, to free them. The game continues until everyone is caught or time is up.

## Health and Protective Behaviours

1. In the story, we are told that Boab was sure he could hear his family singing and that it made him feel sad and loved at the same time.
  - a. Can you think of a time when you felt two conflicting emotions at the same time?
  - b. Was it confusing to feel these two emotions at the same time? Why?
  - c. What was happening at the time?
  - d. What did you feel?
  - e. What did you think?
  - f. What did you do?

The students can write a paragraph about this time using the questions above to structure their answers. Give the students the opportunity to share their experiences with the class if they want to.

2. Boab needs help to get back home to the other boab trees. While waiting for this to happen, he feels sad and lonely. The mice help him to feel safe by taking the time to listen to his story and showing they understand his feelings.
  - a. Brainstorm as a class what it means to be a good friend. Write ideas on the whiteboard.
  - b. In pairs, discuss what qualities you look for in a friend. Share these ideas with the class.
  - c. Use post-it notes to write down what you like about someone in the class. Put the note on their desk.

This can be done as and when the students feel like it, and it can be anonymous if preferred.

3. Boab receives help from many different animals as he makes his way back home.
  - a. Make a list of the people you could trust and turn to for help if you found yourself in a tricky situation. This should include adults from both home and school.
  - b. Discuss as a class, what sort of problems you might encounter and how they could be avoided. Consider online etiquette with social media.

## Science

1. Talk about life cycles and why we call it a life cycle. Brainstorm with the class what plants and animals follow a life cycle and explore a couple on the whiteboard.
  - a. Students can then research the life cycle of a plant or animal of their choice and draw a diagram to represent it. This can be done in pairs or groups with them making a PowerPoint to show the different stages. It can be presented to the class with the use of palm cards as prompts.
2. Students can research the characteristics of the boab tree or another tree found in Australia and write a paragraph about it, where it can be found and the conditions it needs to thrive. They can draw a diagram of the tree and annotate this for a classroom display (See Art suggestion for a cool background).

## FURTHER INFORMATION: CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

### Expressing and developing ideas

- Sentences and clause-level grammar:
  - What a clause is and how simple, compound and complex sentences are constructed through one clause (simple) or by combining clauses using different types of conjunctions (compound and complex).
- Word-level grammar:
  - Different classes of words used in English (nouns, verbs, etc.), the functions they perform in sentences and when they are combined in particular recognisable groups, such as phrases and noun groups.
- Vocabulary:
  - Meanings of words, including everyday and specialist meanings, and how words take their meanings from the context of the text.

### Phonic and word knowledge

- Phonological and phonemic awareness:
  - The ability to identify the discrete sounds in speech (phonemes), and to reproduce and manipulate them orally.
- Alphabet and phonic knowledge:
  - The relationship between sounds and letters (graphemes) and how these are combined when reading and writing.
- Spelling:
  - Knowledge about how sounds (phonemes) of words are represented by letters or letter patterns, knowledge of meaning units within words (morphemes) and word origins.

### Literature

- Literature and Context:
  - How texts reflect the context of culture and the situation in which they are created.

### Responding to literature

- Personal responses to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in texts:
  - An individual response to the ideas, characters and viewpoints in literary texts, including relating texts to their own experiences.
- Features of literary texts:
  - The key features of literary texts and how they work to construct a literary work, such as plot, setting, characterisation, mood and theme.
- Language devices in literary texts, including figurative language:
  - Language devices that authors use and how these create meanings and effects in literary texts, especially devices in poetry.

### Creating literature

- Creating literary texts:
  - Creating their own literary texts based on ideas, features and structures of texts experienced.
- Experimentation and adaptation:
  - Creating a variety of texts, including multimodal texts, adapting ideas and devices from literary texts.

### Literacy

- Texts and the contexts in which they are used:
  - How texts relate to their contexts and reflect the society and culture in which they were created.
- Listening and speaking interactions:
  - Purposes and contexts through which students engage in listening and speaking interactions.
- Listening and speaking interactions:
  - Skills students use when engaging in listening and speaking interactions.
- Oral presentations:

- Formal oral presentations that students engage in, including presenting recounts and information, and presenting and arguing a point of view.

## **Creating texts**

- Creating texts:
  - Creating different types of spoken, written and multimodal texts, using knowledge of text structures and language features.
- Editing:
  - Editing texts for meaning, structure and grammatical features.
- Use of software:
  - Using a range of software applications to construct and edit print and multimodal texts.

## **SCIENCE**

- Year 4
  - Living things have life cycles (making and recording observations of living things as they develop through life cycles).
  - Living things depend on each other and the environment to survive.
- Year 5
  - Living things have structural features and adaptations that help them to survive in their environment.
- Year 6
  - The growth and survival of living things are affected by physical conditions of their environment.