

SUNNY AND SHADOW

HELEN MILROY

ISBN (PB): 9781760995119

YEAR LEVEL: Y3–6

ABOUT THE BOOK

This is a story of how the First Peoples, land, animals, sky and water were all family and how they looked after and understood each other so their world was in balance. It tells of the caring relationship between dingoes and First Nations people and what happened when this harmony was destroyed by colonisers who were greedy and ignorant of these relationships.

The journey to restore the balance takes place over many generations, through the tale of Sunny and a dingo pup called Shadow who go to the Dreaming to save the other dingoes. The gift to communicate with the dingoes is passed down from generation to generation, to a child who has the knowledge to carry on the care for their totem, the dingo.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

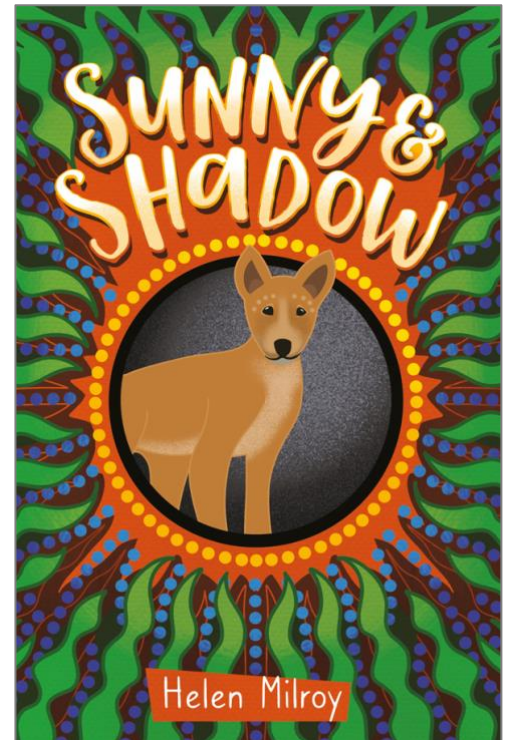
Helen Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She was born and educated in Perth. Helen has always had a passionate interest in health and wellbeing, especially for children. Helen studied medicine at the University of Western Australia. She is currently a professor at the University of Western Australia, Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, and Commissioner with the National Mental Health Commission. Helen was recently appointed as the AFL's first Indigenous Commissioner. Her books for children include *Wombat, Mudlark and Other Stories* (2019), *Backyard Birds* (2020), *Backyard Bugs* (2021), *Backyard Beasties* (2022), *Owl and Star* (2022), *Bush Birds* (2023), *Crow Baby* (2023), *Bush Bugs* (2024), *The Boab Tree* (2024), and *Bush Bubs* (2025).

THEMES

- The importance of family
- Belonging
- First Nations cultures and knowledges
- Connection to and caring for Country
- The impacts of colonisation
- Friendship, trust and kindness
- Reciprocity and responsibility
- Legacy

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y3–6 English
- Y3–6 The Arts
- Y3–6 Biological Science
- Y3–6 Protective Behaviours



USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: helenmilroy.com
- Etymology website: etymonline.com
- Information about dingoes: kidcyber.com.au/dingo
- Arrival of the Dingo: National Museum Australia - Dingoes
- The Dreaming:
 - commonground.org.au/article/the-dreaming
 - workingwithindigenoustralian.info/content/Culture_2_The_Dreaming
- Indigenous History: BTN Special – Connection to Country
- Totems: sydney.edu.au/about-us/vision-and-values/our-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-community/kinship-module/learning-module/totems

CLASSROOM IDEAS

1. Vocabulary – check for understanding of the following words:
 - a. Flourish – **'After the earth started to flourish'** (p. 6)
 - b. Perpetual – **'that life is meant to be a perpetual celebration of the wonder of creation.'** (p. 7)
 - c. Affinity – **'she had a great affinity for the dingoes'** (p. 8).
 - d. Relished – **'and she relished every moment with them'** (p. 10).
 - e. Diminishing – **'and the hope and joy that made life possible was rapidly diminishing'** (p. 15).
 - f. Yarned – **'Shadow yarned about finding the cave'** (p. 40).
 - g. Quizzically – **'said Shadow quizzically'** (p. 41).
 - h. Barren – **'and looked out over the barren wasteland'** (p. 45).
 - i. Mournful – **'and let out a soft, mournful cry'** (p. 45).
 - j. Solemnly – **'said Grandma Calla solemnly'** (p. 52).
 - k. Rejuvenate – **'it would help rejuvenate the old dingo landscape'** (p. 70).

The students can identify which words are new to them and use a dictionary to check their meaning. The students can then work in pairs to explore the etymology of two of the words. This can then be shared with the whole class.

Comprehension questions

1. Chapter 1
 - a. What was the most important lesson for each generation to learn?
 - b. What advice did Calla's grandmother give her?
 - c. Why did Calla call the dingo pup 'Chichi'?
2. Chapter 2
 - a. Why did suffering and despair spread across the landscape?
 - b. Name three things that changed when the different people came to their land.
 - c. What was it that the newcomers desired?
 - d. What did Calla's family do to try and help the dingoes?
3. Chapter 3
 - a. What did Mother Dingo teach her pups to do in case something should happen?
 - b. Why did the dingo pups feel sad?
4. Chapter 4
 - a. What was it that caused Mother Dingo to give the warning bark?
 - b. What gift did Chichi receive in the cave and what did it do?
5. Chapter 5
 - a. In this chapter, we learn that Sunny felt out of place and didn't belong. She felt **'like something was missing from her life'** (p. 33). What do you think this was, and why did it make her feel that way?
 - b. What did Sunny enjoy learning about that was never taught in school? Why do you think these things are important?
 - c. Why do you think that Sunny looked **'strangely familiar'** to Chichi?
 - d. What was Sunny's real name? Why was she called Sunny?
 - e. Why did she call Chichi 'Shadow'?
 - f. How did Peanut get his name?
6. Chapter 6
 - a. Why was Sunny shocked when she realised she could understand what Shadow was saying?
7. Chapter 7
 - a. Mother Earth is given feelings like a person. This is called personification. What examples can you find?
8. Chapter 8
 - a. Why was Shadow shimmering?
 - b. Why did Sunny and Shadow feel it was best for Shadow to remain invisible?
9. Chapter 9
 - a. We are told there were **'tears of sadness and joy streaming down their faces'** (p. 55). Why were Chichi, Sunny and Grandma Calla feeling both sad and joyful?

10. Chapter 10
 - a. In the cave, we are told **'the past, present and future coexisted, making travel through time possible'** (p. 64). What do you understand by this?
11. Chapter 11
 - a. What does Sunny do to save the dingoes? What is different from the previous time the men on horseback arrived?
12. Chapter 12
 - a. Why is Mother Earth happy again?
13. Chapter 14
 - a. What did Daisy have to do and understand before she could become the safe place for dingoes?
 - b. What is the significance of the small black crystals that Daisy is given?

Discussion Questions

1. Calla's grandmother told her to **'always be kind and help others'** (p. 9). What advice have you been given that has felt important to you and made a difference in how you behave?
2. Sunny feels **'out of place'** (p. 31) and as if she didn't fit in. Have you ever felt out of place at school? What was happening at the time and what did you do about it? Brainstorm ideas of how you can help and support each other at these times.
3. Sunny loved learning things that were not taught in school, such as the old ways of caring for Country, and all the ways of the birds and the animals. Discuss what things you feel should be taught in school today that are not part of the curriculum. Why do you feel they would be useful? Encourage students to give their opinions and the reasoning behind their thoughts.
4. A major theme throughout the book is that of balance between us, our environment and the world in general. Each generation learned **'that when life is abundant and in balance, future generations can thrive'** (p. 7). Discuss this in terms of what is happening in the world today. Are we in a balanced state in the environment, between nations, in our own country? If not, why not? What can we do differently?
5. Sunny is told in her dream that **'the answer you seek lies in your knowledge, courage, culture and family'** (p. 59). What do you think this means? How will this help her save the dingoes?

Creative Writing

1. Throughout the book, the author uses adverbs to add detail and interest to her writing. In groups, take a chapter each and note down the adverbs you find. Make a class poster of these adverbs and the sentences they appear in.
2. Write a story about a character (human or animal) that can travel in time using a gift they find in an unusual place. Use detailed descriptive language for the setting and make sure the main character's personality is described as well as their physical appearance. Once you have finished the story, edit the main action by adding adverbs to create interest and mood.
3. Make a list of all the ideas the students have about what should be taught in school that isn't. The students can choose one and prepare a persuasive piece to convince their audience that this should be a part of the curriculum. Brainstorm effective language they can include in their writing and make a poster of it for them to refer to and demonstrate the structure they should use by creating a persuasive text together first.

The Arts

1. As a class, make a family tree of the characters we are introduced to in this book. Highlight the three people who have the gift to be able to converse with the dingoes.
 - a. Create a visual representation of the important people in your life, showing your connection with them.
2. In small groups, create a before-and-after image of the landscape described in chapters one and two, prior to and after **'other people from elsewhere took over the lands and brought different ways with them'** (p. 13). Students can use the medium of their choice.

Biological Sciences

1. In Chapter 11, we are told that the dingoes were being resettled from elsewhere through a conservation program. What is a conservation program and in what ways do they help to save endangered species? Can you find information on how groups are helping to protect the dingo today?