

## UNDER A BILARI TREE I BORN

ALICE BILARI SMITH WITH ANNA VITENBERGS  
AND LOREEN BREHAUT

ISBN (PB): 9781760995645

YEAR LEVEL: Y7–12

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

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Alice Bilari Smith lived in the Pilbara, on stations and in the bush, on government reserves and in towns. Narrowly avoiding removal from her family by 'the Welfare', life on the stations taught her to cook and launder, sew and clean, shoe horses, chop wood and milk cows. As a young married woman she added mustering, dingo scalping, shearers' assistant and sheep-yard building to her skills. Alice also grew up in the ways of her country, hunting, cooking and building in the traditional manner. As well as having a large family of her own, Alice played an active role in caring for other Aboriginal children and initiated the establishment of a Homemakers Centre in Roebourne. This is Alice's insightful and inspiring story – the story of a life that is remarkable and yet typical of Australia's strong country women.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Bilari Smith was born at Rocklea Station in the Pilbara in the 1920s. Her mother was a Banyjima woman and her father a white teamster. She was raised by her Aboriginal family and narrowly escaped being removed to Moore River. After her marriage, Alice spent most of her adult years living in the bush and raising a large family. They retained their language and many of their customs; it was not until 1969 that Alice settled in Roebourne so that her children could attend school. Living in Roebourne, she was a foster mother to fifteen children and a valued member of the community. Alice died on 1 February 2012 at Roebourne District Hospital.

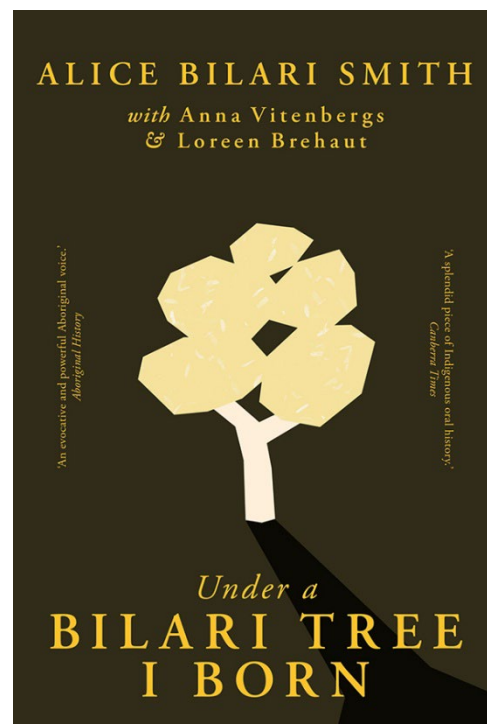
### THEMES

- Family
- Identity
- Home
- Colonisation
- Women's rights

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y7–12 English

Y7–12 History



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. What are the key themes raised by Alice Bilari Smith in her biography? Make a list, using quotes from the text to support each item.
2. Why did Alice and her co-authors choose to keep Alice's story as narrated by her and not change her sentences into Standard Australian English? What is the effect of this on your reading experience?
3. When the British arrived in Australia, many Aboriginal place names were replaced with English words. Find examples where this has happened in your local area.
  - a. What effect do you think the renaming of Indigenous people and place names had on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?
  - b. What effect do you think the renaming of Indigenous people and place names had on settlers?
  - c. How is language linked to power?
4. Revisit the book's appendices.
  - a. Why do you think 'Alice Smith's Native Welfare Department File' was included?
  - b. What values, attitudes and assumptions are demonstrated by the officials who wrote these documents? What rights and freedoms is Alice denied?
5. How did the inclusion of historical photographs and documents contribute to your understanding of Alice's story?

### Essay questions

1. How does Alice Bilari Smith represent Australian culture, place and identity in *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*?
2. Critically analyse the relationships between significant historical events and figures and their representation in literature with reference to *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*.
3. Explore the representation of one or more of the following in *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*: gender, race, family, colonisation.
4. Critically analyse the representation of trauma in *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*.
5. Critically analyse the relationship between setting and personal identity in *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*.

### Creative writing

1. Create a free verse poem around the theme of 'family'. In pairs, brainstorm the sounds, sights and smells of your childhood to help generate initial ideas for your poem. The final pieces can be shared at a poetry reading at your school or even by publishing a school poetry journal.
2. Think of a place or landscape that carries special significance for you. Consider the ways in which you might define your identity in relation to it. Write a free verse poem exploring your relationship with this place.

### History

1. Research the institutions and missions mentioned throughout *Under a Bilari Tree I Born*.
  - a. When were they opened/closed?
  - b. Who was in charge?
  - c. Which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were sent where?
  - d. How many people lived in each institution?
  - e. What were the living conditions?
  - f. What was the disciplinary system?
  - g. Locate historical photographs.
2. What was the *Bringing Them Home* (1997) report and what were its findings? ([www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997)).

3. As a class, view former prime minister Kevin Rudd's apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples from 13 February 2008 (approx. 4 mins) and discuss its place in Australian history. ([www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples](http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples))
4. Research and write a biography of a famous Indigenous Australian.
5. Research the history of women's rights in Australia. Present your findings in a structured report. Include a timeline.
6. Reread the text box on the British nuclear weapon tests in Australia in the 1950s (p. 138). Research this topic and write a summary of your findings.

## Biological science

1. Research traditional forms of Aboriginal Australian bush medicine. Focus on one plant and present your findings in a structured report, including such information as the plant's scientific name, common name, Aboriginal name, habitat, life cycle, labelled diagram, medicinal uses, conservation status and interesting facts.



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