BLU AND THE LOST STORM

SABRINA DUDGEON-SWIFT
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YEAR LEVEL: Y3–7
CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Sustainability



ABOUT THE BOOK

Eleven-year-old Blu loves spending weekends fishing on Larrakia Country in Darwin with his dad, his best friend Elijah and his faithful dog, Storm. But on one outing, things take a dramatic turn when Storm goes missing in the mangroves. Blu is heavy with guilt. Not only did he not protect Storm, but he also fears the worst after a recent sighting of a cunning crocodile hanging around the creek.

With help from his dad and Elijah, a risky rescue mission unfolds – they need to find Storm before the crocodile does! Blu navigates what now feels like dangerous territory, while battling his fears and learning the true meaning of loyalty, courage, friendship and the bond between a boy and his dog.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sabrina Dudgeon-Swift is descended from the Bardi people from north of Broome, and the Gija people in the East Kimberley. Sabrina grew up in Darwin, but now lives in Perth and works for the School of Indigenous Studies at The University of Western Australia.

THEMES

- Courage
- Family
- Friendship
- Connection to Country
- Sustainability
- Environmental care

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

- Y3–7 English
- Y3–7 HASS
- Y3–7 Arts
- Y3–7 Science
- Y3–7 Maths

USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's page: fremantlepress.com.au/contributor/sabrina-dudgeon
- Bard Jawi documentary (25 mins): youtu.be/dMt1SI8IbT0?si=20OX3oOJ2fY-BdBB
- Boola Bardip WA Museum hosts permanent exhibitions that feature Bardi cultural materials and stories, including the Changes Gallery. They run Aboriginal guided tours weekly. visit.museum.wa.gov.au/boolabardip/changes
- Further non-fiction children's reading: *Our World Bardi Jaawi, Life at Ardiyooloon* (Magabala Books, 2010): magabala.com/products/our-worldbardijaawi-life-at-ardiyooloon

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion Questions

1. Just based on the title and cover image alone, what do you think *Blu and The Lost Storm* is about?
2. How does the author start the story? Did you find it engaging?
3. Where and when is the story set? What do you know about Darwin or the Northern Territory? What do you learn about that environment in this story?
4. Whose perspective is the story being told from? How does this influence the way the story is told? Imagine if the story was told from Blu's sister's perspective – how might the story be different?
5. What do we learn about Blu and his family? Map out the key characters: their goals, fears, likes, dislikes and physical attributes.
6. Were there any new words used in this book that you didn't understand? What does the family's use of language tell us about their characters?
7. What event kicks off the main conflict in the story?
8. Who is Storm and why is he so important to Blu's family? How did you feel when he went missing?
9. Did Blu's family and friendships remind you of people in your own life? Why or why not?
10. What new facts does Blu learn about crocodiles? Did you learn anything new through reading the book?
11. What does the simile in this sentence mean: **'It looks like a pig has been rolling around in the muddy puddle and then dragged its body through the clearing like a giant snake trail'** (p. 102)? Ask students to find one simile or one metaphor in the text and explain what it means.
12. What is the overall plot – can you identify the main events and how they are connected? Plot each chapter on a 'story mountain' to identify the introduction, build-up, conflict, climax and resolution.
13. Did the story end the way you thought it would? Did you find the ending satisfying?
14. How does Blu change by the end of the story? Did any other characters change or grow?
15. What do you think is the main lesson of the book that the author wants the reader to know?

English & Creative Writing

1. Write a personal response to the book – how did it make you feel? What did you learn? Choose one strong image from the book that stands out in your mind. What words or techniques did the author use to create that particular image?
2. The first line in the book is: **'The engine coughs awake, the boat jerks and Dad shouts through the salty air, "Pull the anchor up, Blu, we don't want to get stranded in this creek when the tide goes out."'** (p. 1). How does this first sentence work to pull us in?
    a. Brainstorm a list of great ways to start a story, otherwise known as a 'hook'. e.g. a dilemma/struggle, flashbacks, dialogue, action, describing a character.
    b. Using the prompt 'Animals/Pets', write the first sentence (a 'hook') to a story about a pet or other animal, trying your best to make it as engaging as possible for the reader.
3. Read the description of Storm when he is first introduced in Chapter 4, 'Crazy Storm'. How do you feel about Storm? What techniques has the author used to make you feel that way?
    a. In small groups or pairs, draw your favourite character from the book and brainstorm a list of character traits around their portrait. e.g. what they look like, how they behave, how other people act around them.
    b. Write a short scene about a courageous character, possibly from the 'Animal/Pets' prompt earlier, and make them appear 'brave and loyal' without stating this – purely through describing them physically, their actions or how other characters respond to them. This is called 'showing, not telling'.
4. There is a rich diversity of language used in this book, including colloquial Australian slang and Aboriginal English.
    a. Discuss: what different languages are spoken in Australia?
    b. Go around the room and ask students to say a word for 'hello' in a language other than English, or a 'slang' colloquial word in English. Why is it important we write our stories in the ways we speak at home and with our friends and family?
    c. Find and brainstorm a list of different language words used in the book that aren't standard Australian English. For example:
        i. Bala
        ii. big fella

iii. deadly teacher
iv. my Bardi boy
v. barra
vi. nooroo

Discuss any words students are unfamiliar with from the book and guess at their meaning using context.

5. In pairs, write a scene between two characters who are having an argument because they want different things. Apart from physical or behavioural differences, use dialogue to make the characters as different as possible by giving them different language or communication styles – perhaps one of them says some words in a language other than English; perhaps one character is very formal or 'posh', and the other only speaks in slang. Take turns reading your 'argument' stories aloud to the class at the end.
6. Blu has a nightmare on p. 119 about Storm being dragged underwater by a crocodile. When he wakes up, he realises she is still missing. What are the different kinds of conflict shown in this example (e.g internal, external, etc.)? Why does conflict matter in a story generally?
    a. As a group, brainstorm examples of external and internal conflict in the book, e.g. Blu's guilt when he lost Storm versus a crocodile stalking Blu from the mangrove.
    b. Using the prompt word 'Lost', write a short story of a character who has lost something or someone, and include at least one example of internal conflict and one external conflict.
7. What are some ways the author builds tension, both before and after Storm goes missing? Discuss Chapter 14, 'Whale Songs', and find examples where the tension rises.
    a. On p. 152, Blu listens deeply in the mangrove as he desperately searches for Storm: **'I hear water hitting the side of our boat like a low drum ... I hear several birds calling out to each other and hundreds of different insects making high-pitched and sharp buzzing sounds.'** Which adjectives in this sentence above build tension and why? As a group, try swapping out some of the adjectives with tonally different words to contrast how important adjectives are in creating an atmosphere, e.g. try 'gentle hooting' instead of 'sharp buzzing'.
    b. Ask for some volunteers – what sounds scare us? Now, imagine we are lost in the Darwin mangroves at night. Brainstorm a list of sounds or other adjectives to describe what you might see, hear or sense in the mangroves that build tension.
    c. Apart from imagery or descriptive language, what other techniques can writers use to build tension in a story? Brainstorm some ideas together.
    d. Ask students to write a short story about a character in a strange or scary place. Describe the sounds the character hears to add tension or excitement. Try to build the tension as much as you can – but do not resolve the story – reach a climax and leave the reader wanting more.

The Arts

1. Ask students to create a split-level composition artwork (above and below the waterline) depicting a mangrove ecosystem, aimed at teaching students about composition.
    a. Using A4 or A3 paper, pencils, fine-liners/textas, oil pastels or watercolours, ask students to choose one primary mangrove animal or plant that will be their 'hero' subject. Alternatively, magazines can be cut up to make a mangrove collage. Position the hero animal or plant slightly off-centre, using the rule of thirds to draw attention.
    b. Create a sense of equilibrium by making the painting visually balanced. For instance, above water, the air, leaves and birds give it a lighter, asymmetrical feel, while the heavy roots and creatures below water give the artwork a dense foundation. Encourage students to balance the empty spaces and be careful where they draw or place plants/animals.
    c. Research the textures of the mangrove ecosystem to build interesting patterns. Then use a black fine-liner to add these patterns and textures to the background shapes, using line and shape repetition to mimic ones found in nature, e.g. repeating scales on a fish or leaf veins.
    d. Use watercolour paints over the oil pastels to add colour and add further contrast between the above and below waterline.
    e. Wrap up by asking students to analyse their own work by answering questions:
        i. Where does the eye go first and why?
        ii. How did you achieve balance in your painting?
        iii. What are three patterns you managed to recreate from nature in this artwork?

Humanities and Social Sciences

1. What are some of the ways we can see humans impacting Darwin's environment, positively and negatively? Brainstorm some examples from the book and then do your own research on human relationships to land and ocean in the Northern Territory, and present your findings back to the class.
2. Explain what 'natural', 'human' and 'capital resources' are.
    a. Work in pairs to put the following items under the right resource type heading:
        i. Ocean currents
        ii. Beach clean-up volunteers
        iii. Drone technology
        iv. Marine biologists
        v. Clean ocean water
        vi. Rescue boats
        vii. Plastic-collecting nets
        viii. Sunshine
        ix. Ocean protection laws
        x. Government policy makers.
    b. Brainstorm different resource examples that are used in the book to save Storm when he goes missing, e.g. rangers, a drone, croc trap, the tidal movements, mangrove trees, etc. What natural, human and capital resources might be used to tackle a different problem – like the plastic Blu finds in the fish stomachs? Discuss as a class how resources can be managed to protect the ocean's animals from pollution and plastic.
    c. Then have students write short-answer responses to these three connection questions:
        i. How do HUMAN RESOURCES use CAPITAL RESOURCES to protect a NATURAL RESOURCE?
        Example answer: Marine biologists (human) use plastic-collecting nets (capital) to clean up plastic from the ocean water (natural) so turtles don't eat it.
        ii. Imagine we have plenty of money and capital resources (like high-tech boats and drones), but we have zero human resources. What happens to the ocean pollution?
        Example Answer: The boats and drones will just sit there unused. Without the skills and labour of people to steer and program them, the plastic will keep harming the animals.
        iii. Brainstorm one new CAPITAL RESOURCE that humans could invent in the future to stop plastic from reaching the ocean.
        iv. *Example answer:* Floating fish traps placed at the mouths of rivers.
3. On p. 57 Blu says, **'Our Aboriginal ancestors fished these same waters and mangroves tens of thousands of years before us. It feels really special.'** Bring in a local Aboriginal ranger group to learn about how they manage Country, and work with the class to build a set of questions to ask the rangers before they arrive. For example, ask them what their relationship to the ocean or rivers mean to them; the deep time history of this place or their personal histories that lead them to being rangers; how they practice sustainability; any 'resource scarcity' that makes their jobs difficult; and what kinds of resources they use to look after Country. Afterwards, as a group, paint a poster about the rangers and the information they shared, focusing on four themes: People, History, Country and Resources.

Science

1. Blu describes how his family care for Country: **'... We put all the small undersized fish back into the water. We also put any females carrying eggs back into the water. Dad has always said that's how the life cycle continues and a way to always have fish in our creeks if everyone does the same'** (p. 51). What does 'sustainability' mean? What are some ways you have seen people being sustainable?
2. Has anyone seen a mangrove like the ones that appear in *Blu and The Lost Storm*? Where do you find them? How would you describe a mangrove to someone who has never been?
    a. A mangrove is a microhabitat. Research what 'ecosystems' and 'microhabitats' are and what makes mangroves unique.
    b. Explore the roles that light and shadow play in a mangrove habitat, e.g what is the canopy, understorey and root zone? Explore the nursery effect, temperature control and camouflage for animals.

   c. Build a model mangrove root system using twigs and popsicle sticks. Use a flashlight representing the sun at different angles to observe how shadows are cast by the ‘roots’ changing. Explain how shifting shadows provide moving hiding spots for prey animals avoiding predators, like crocodiles.

3. On p. 142, the rangers tell Blu and Elijah that crocodiles have bumps on their skin called 'scutes' that help them manipulate the water around them so they don’t leave ripples on the surface of the water, which helps them to hunt. Discuss how animals have evolved to adapt to their environment – every living thing has special features that help them survive in their home, like the crocodile's scutes. These features are called 'adaptations'.
   a. What is the difference between behavioural and physical traits in animals?
   b. Research and write a list of at least one physical and one behavioural trait under five animals from the story: e.g. a crocodile, a human, a mud crab, a barramundi fish and octopus, to explore the different ways they have adapted to survive in this mangrove environment.
4. Blu describes the huge tidal changes in the ocean surrounding Darwin. Sometimes there might be two high tides and two low tides daily in Darwin! High tides push nutrient-rich water and baitfish into the mangroves, bringing in larger predatory fish. Low tides expose rock platforms and mudflats, making it the perfect time to collect mud crabs and shellfish.
   a. Visualise how the ocean moves by simulating a tidal tug-of-war. Have four students hold the corners of a blue tarp or sheet, representing the water. One student stands a few steps away with a 'moon' ball. When the 'Moon' steps closer to one side, the students holding the tarp must gently pull the fabric toward the moon, creating a bulge (high tide). Notice how the fabric on the opposite sides stretches tight and lowers (low tide). Discuss how as the Earth spins, our beaches move in and out of these water bulges twice a day.
   b. Ask the students to imagine they are a Bardi family like Blu’s ancestors, living in balance with nature and the tides. Give the students a short quiz and ask them to write their answers down.
      i. You want to collect shellfish and oysters from the oceans rocks. Should you go out at high tide or low tide?
      A: Low tide.
      ii. Your family wants to catch barramundi hiding up the river where the water is mostly fresh. Why does a high tide help you catch a fish further up the river?
      A: The ocean high tide pushes water up into the river mouth. This makes the river rise and lets the big ocean fish swim deep into the freshwater areas to hunt.
      iii. If you find a rock pool at low tide full of trapped baby fish, what is the best way to live in a sustainable cycle with Country? Catch all of them to eat them all, or leave them alone?
      A: Leave them alone so they can reproduce when the high tide returns.
   c. Finish by asking students to look up a local Indigenous seasonal calendar and look for references to the ocean, tidal movements and Indigenous relationships to the ocean. Ask them to write a journal entry about their findings and present back to the class later.
5. On p. 79, Blu finds a Coke bottle top, a pen lid, a dead hermit crab and a tapeworm inside the stomach of a fish. Explain to students that when scientists look inside a healthy fish, they expect to see items from the natural food chain. Finding human-made debris is a clear sign that the environment is out of balance.
   a. As a group, brainstorm a list of normal things you might expect to find in a fish’s stomach, and a list of not normal things that might be concerning.
   b. Prepare the 'stomach' of a fish by filling small ziplock bags with 'normal' and 'not normal' items. Use wet oatmeal to represent stomach fluids. Mix in natural items like seashells or rosemary for 'seaweed', alongside 'pollution' – sequins, straws, beads, thread.
   c. In small groups, give each group their own 'stomach' and have them use tweezers to extract items, sorting them onto a paper chart labelled 'Normal' vs 'Not Normal' and tally their findings.
   d. Discussion questions for the class:
      i. If a fish is eating plastic in the middle of the ocean, how did that plastic get there if no humans live there?
      ii. What changes can we make at school or at home to stop these 'Not Normal' things from entering the ocean?

Maths

1. Blu and Elijah go on a camping and fishing weekend trip. They catch a total of 24 fish.
    a. On Saturday they caught 15 fish. How many fish did they catch on Sunday?
    b. If they put the fish into 3 equal buckets to take home, how many fish are in each bucket?
    c. If each fish caught on Sunday was 5 cm long, what was the total combined length of Sunday's catch?
2. Crocodiles can go through 3000 teeth in their lifetime. Some crocs can live for over a hundred years.
    a. If a crocodile lives for 120 years, how many teeth would it be losing every month each year?
    b. If the crocodile received $2 from the Tooth Fairy for every tooth it lost, how much money would the crocodile have?
3. Blu and Zari go crabbing in an estuary. A male mud crab must have a minimum shell width of 15 cm (or 150 mm) across its widest point to be kept. They check their crab pots and catch a total of 8 male mud crabs. They measure the shell width of each crab:
    - Crab 1: 12.4 cm
    - Crab 2: 15.1 cm
    - Crab 3: 16.0 cm
    - Crab 4: 13.8 cm
    - Crab 5: 15.0 cm
    - Crab 6: 14.5 cm
    - Crab 7: 17.2 cm
    - Crab 8: 15.5 cm

    a. Using the legal minimum size limit of 15 cm, list which crab numbers Blu and Zari are allowed to keep and which ones they must throw back into the water.
    b. What fraction of the total crabs they caught are legal to keep? Write your answer in simplest form.
    c. How much wider is the largest legal crab compared to the smallest legal crab they kept?
    d. What is the average (mean) shell width of all 8 crabs they caught? Round your answer.

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