

The Shy Mala

Published by Windy Hollow Books

Teachers' notes

This story came from a true story told to me by June Butcher, the owner of the Kanyana wildlife sanctuary in Gooseberry Hill. The story June told me was this;

The mala are a small nocturnal wallaby that primarily live in the Tanami Desert north of Alice Springs. They are extremely shy and in danger of extinction from feral cats, foxes and habitat destruction due to wild fire. To save the last few mala left in the wild the rangers and the Warlpiri people held a meeting.

An enclosure was built on Warlpiri land and many of the mala were held there. Thirty mala were then sent to Barna Mia a special enclosure in the Dryandra Woodland south of Perth. The mala are so shy that special traps were used to catch them called Bromilow traps.

After the mala had been at Barna Mia for several months the Warlpiri people sent two of their people to check on them. They went into the enclosure in broad daylight and sat down and began singing and playing their sticks. And one by one the mala came out.

Since that time more mala have been sent to other secure places like the Dorean Bernier Islands. Last year some mala were released back into an enclosure near Uluru. There have been no recorded sightings of mala in the wild.

In order to do the illustrations for the book and to ask permission from the traditional owners of the mala, Sophia travelled to the Yuendumu community in the Tanami desert.

Before Reading Activities.

What can students guess about the book from reading the title?

What can they tell about the book from looking at the cover?

Talk about endangered species.

Discuss where the book is set.

Discuss the style of artwork and any other artwork they've seen that it reminds them of.

What is the significance of the colours used? How do they make you feel?

Discuss the forward by Boori Pryor, what do they think it means?

During Reading Activities

How do the illustrations help build the story?

How do they build the mood of the story and the sense of place?

Discuss the importance of the first picture. (The desert is the only place where you have both sunrise and sunset.)

Discuss with the students the destruction caused by cats and foxes and how they were introduced.

What does the author mean by 'secret dreaming business'?

Why does she use the word dreaming instead of dreamtime? (dreaming indicates something that is still happening today, dreamtime refers to a time in the past.)

Why do the rangers and the Warlpiri people trap the mala?

How do they ensure that the trapping doesn't harm the animal?

How do the pictures change as the book progresses?

Can you find the colours of the aboriginal flag in the picture where the two elders are sitting on the ground? (Look at the woman.)

What is meant by, 'Their totem was safe'?

Why do you think the mala was the Warlpiri people's totem?

After Reading Activities.

Discuss the information page.

Discussion questions.

Do you think the title 'The Shy Mala' suits the book?

Can you think of anything you'd like better?

What do you think inspired Liliانا Stafford to write this book?

How does the book link Indigenous Australians to endangered species?

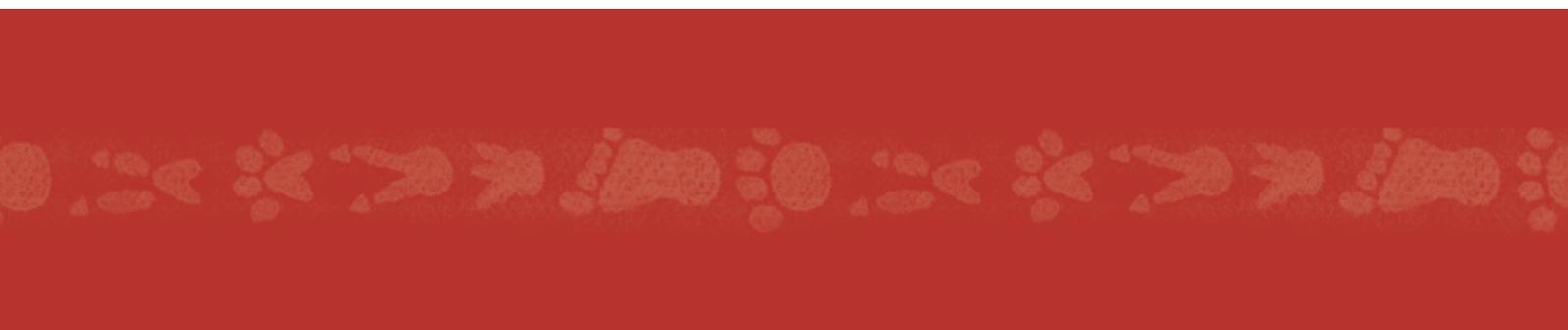
What does the story tell us about the connection between the Warlpiri people and the mala?

What is the importance of the final picture, how does it relate to the story?

What is the significance of the borders?

Trace the journey of the mala from the desert to Dryandra. Are there parallels with the Warlpiri people's own story? What other stories could you compare this book to?

Discuss why the illustrator doesn't use real people in the pictures. What might be the problems in doing this?



Reading and writing

Students retell the story in their own words.

Students retell the story from the point of view of someone in the desert at sunrise. They see a mala under a bush then they see a feral cat or fox. What happens next?

Write a letter to someone in another country explaining how the mala became endangered.

Read books by Boori Pryor. (Maybe Tomorrow, Njunjul the Sun.)

Drama

Improvise the mala being rescued and taken to a safe enclosure and seeing the other mala there.

Improvise the elders going into the enclosure and sitting down to sing and play their sticks and the mala coming out.

Invite an Aboriginal performer to the school to teach dances and songs (Yirriyakin theatre company?)

Art

Draw a desert sunrise

Make a model mala.

Design a poster for the mala and other animals at Dryandra.

Make an Australian desert diorama.

Social Studies

Discuss the importance of saving threatened species.

Make a Noongar season calendar

Design your own wildlife sanctuary.

Research and learn some local indigenous words.

Research the Warlpiri people and their culture.

Make an educational pamphlet on the mala.

Invite a speaker from Kanyana Wildlife Centre to the school.

Visit the Barna Mia enclosure in Dryandra.

Discuss how this story repeats the story of other endangered species, compare and contrast.

