



Teacher Notes
A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story
written by Steve Hawke
Magabala Books

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SYNOPSIS

An historical account of the origins of the remote town of Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia's Kimberley region. Author Steve Hawke has cleverly integrated the stories told to him by the district's Aboriginal Elders with the many primary sources that reveal the township's tumultuous past. Against adversity and decades of mistreatment and neglect, the town has emerged as one championing the virtues of leadership, perseverance and resilience.

THEMES

Indigenous Culture

- Aspects of Indigenous culture are embedded in the text, such as:
 - Kinship and importance of family
 - An innate trust in and respect for tradition
 - Respect for elders, family, rules and community
 - Indigenous language

Pastoral Industry

- The pastoral industry mistreated Indigenous workers for decades, including poor wages and living conditions
- The pastoral industry relied heavily on the Indigenous workforce, however neglected to recognise any traditional ties various groups had to the land on which they were operating

Australian History

- There was much injustice and inequality towards the Indigenous peoples of this era
- Missions and government departments often did not serve in the best interests of Indigenous peoples
- Many Indigenous people were displaced

- Primary sources including reports, letters, photographs and recounts are used to piece together the history of the region

WRITING STYLE

A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story combines the first-hand accounts of local Indigenous storytellers with an historical narrative that pieces together the region's past. Steve Hawke uses extensive references from a wide variety of primary source documents to reveal a well-informed and thoroughly researched history not only of Fitzroy Crossing but also that of the pastoral industry and its mistreatment of Indigenous peoples.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

These notes have been written in context with the Australian Curriculum. The appendix highlights a selection of relevant cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and content descriptors across a range of year levels that the following activities address.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- The foreword written by Bunuba leader, Joe Ross, captures the true sense of community and spirit of the Fitzroy Crossing region. Discuss this foreword, extracting what you see as relevant qualities of the community that Fitzroy emulates.
- What does Joe Ross mean in the foreword when he says, 'to define your future is to know your past'?
- In the 19th Century, the Bunuba people fought courageously against the white pastoralisation of their land under their fearless leader, Jandamarra. Research Jandamarra's stand against the white take-over of Bunuba land. Good starting points include *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* by Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorunmurra. Also the following links:
 - <http://www.jandamarra.com.au/> Jandamarra website (Bunuba community)
 - <http://www.kimberleyaustralia.com/story-of-jandamarra.html> Kimberley Australia
 - <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1204849.htm> ABC Television
- Olive Knight describes Fitzroy Crossing as a 'family town' (p202). What does she mean by this? What evidence is there of her statement throughout *A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story*.

- Create a timeline that shows the history of the Indigenous groups of the Fitzroy area as depicted in *A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story*.
- As you are reading, refer to the maps at the beginning of the text. These include both small-scale and large-scale maps. Take note of the cartographic conventions of these maps (BOLTSS – Border, Orientation, Legend, Title, Scale and Source).
- In his preface, Steve Hawke writes about the remarkable leaders who created a 'new world when that old one collapsed'. Write a reflection that discusses the author's meaning.
- In what ways was the pastoral industry of this time relying on a 'semi-feudal system of co-dependence'? Unpack the concepts inherent in this term.
- Steve Hawke incorporates an extensive use of primary sources to piece together this history. Take note of the information he has extrapolated from such sources. What primary sources can you utilise to reveal and describe the past. Think about the place, suburb, town where you live, and what similar primary resources can you utilise or access that will reveal the Indigenous history of your area? Discuss.
- It is said that in the 1890s, Fitzroy Crossing 'stumbled into existence' (p34). Describe what is meant by this comment.
- Massacres and being 'placed on the chain' (see footnote on p52) are two examples of atrocities committed by the white pastoralists, police force and governments of the time. Investigate these issues further.
- How do the rations and types of foods given to the Indigenous people reflect the opinions and attitudes of this era?
- Discuss the statement that the system in place on the stations was 'only two or three steps removed from slavery' (p62). Compare the treatment of Aboriginal people with other examples of slavery.
- Imagine you are an Indigenous child living on one of the stations. Write a recount of your experiences that shows your full understanding of the social and living conditions you had to endure.
- In what ways were the rights of Indigenous people violated during this era of Australian history? Give examples from the text to support your response.
- In a paragraph, respond to the following statement from the text:
'Politically and economically the peoples of the Fitzroy Valley were completely subjugated. But they maintained a rich cultural and spiritual life' (p65).
- Re-read the primary source record written by District Officer Pullen (DNW) on page 68 about living conditions. In what ways was Pullen an advocate of the Indigenous peoples of the region?

- What does it mean that Australia was 'riding on the sheep's back' (p79)?
- Examine the many tables that compare the anomalies in wages, population and education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (pp118-121). What conclusions can you draw from these tables?
- Re-read the Louisa Downs report on page125. How does this extract capture the essence of the injustice and inequality that was experienced by the Indigenous people?
- Why do you think that many of the storytellers refer to the 1950s as the 'good old days'?
- What impacts, positive and negative, did the establishment of the 'mission' have on the people of Fitzroy Crossing?
- In what ways did the granting of citizenship impact on the local Indigenous population? With the benefit of hindsight, what changes would you make to citizenship laws?
- How did the introduction of droving affect the stations' control over Indigenous workforces?
- Chapter eleven is entitled 'You Don't Tell Me What to Do'. Summarise this chapter, demonstrating your understanding of the importance of the changes being foreshadowed.
- On page128, Jimmy Shandley speaks about his desire to become a diesel mechanic. Compare his story with the opportunities that you are likely to have in terms of career and education options. How have things changed since Jimmy's adolescence? In what ways do you think things may *not* have changed for Indigenous Australians?
- The 60s and 70s brought about a lot of social and political change to the people of the Kimberley region. Outline what these significant changes were and how they impacted on the lives of the locals of this area.
- How did the introduction of equal wages affect Indigenous workers? How did it impact on job opportunities on the stations?
- Discuss Steve Hawke's analogy on page154 of the storm that was building. To what is he referring?
- Using Michael Angelo's letter as stimulus (p180/181), write a reflection that explains his point of view.
- What key values and principles of the leaders of Fitzroy Crossing do you respect and admire? Give examples to support your ideas.
- The foreword mentions Danny Marr's hit song, 'Home Sweet Home.' In small groups, examine the lyrics and sentiments shared through this song. How does it affiliate with Steve Hawke's text and the words of the storytellers?
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhVGOkpCYUg>

- Create a script for a scene or play based on one of the storyteller's recollections.

Appendix – Links to the Australian Curriculum

<p>Cross Curriculum Priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
<p>General Capabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy • Intercultural Understanding • Personal and Social Capability • Critical and Creative Thinking
<p>Historical Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronology, terms and concepts • Historical questions and research • Analysis and use of sources • Perspectives and interpretations • Explanation and communication • Observing, questioning and planning • Collecting, recording, evaluating and representing <p>Geographical Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreting, analysing and concluding • Communicating • Reflecting and responding