

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Dark Emu. Black seeds: agriculture or accident

by Bruce Pascoe

Teacher Notes prepared by Nola Turner-Jensen

OVERVIEW

Dark Emu. Black seeds: Agriculture or Accident? puts forward an argument for a reconsideration of the hunter-gatherer tag for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians. The evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing – behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag. Rupert Gerritsen and Bill Gammage in their latest books support this premise but Pascoe takes this a step further and challenges the hunter-gatherer tag as a convenient lie.

THEMES

- Indigenous culture
- Pastoral industry
- Land management
- Australian history
- Race relations

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Dark Emu presents extensive visual and written source material, including explorers' journals and contemporary interviews, to present an alternative view of pre-colonial Aboriginal society. Written in third person, with the author's voice pitching into the narrative, this book provides a glimpse of Australia as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people once saw it. The text's accessibility makes it perfect as reference material for upper secondary Geography and History students.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to Year 9 Geography and Year 10 History. The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities.

CULTURAL NOTES

In this text, students will learn how the Aboriginal people of Australia used traditional conservation and land management practices over thousands of years. For more information regarding the themes explored the following links maybe helpful:

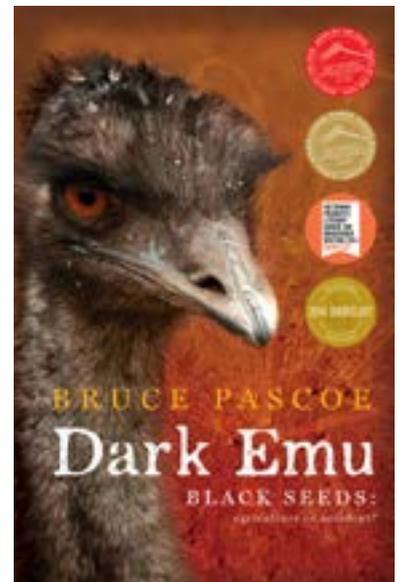
<http://www.12canoes.com.au/>

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/digibook/1587973/taming-the-australian-desert>

<http://www.crackerjackededucation.com.au/resources/interactive-timeline-1770-1810/>

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/main.html>

For information about teaching Australian Indigenous content see [Teaching Indigenous content with Magabala Books.](#)





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Pascoe is a Bunurong man born in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond. He is a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria and has been the director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission. Pascoe has had a varied career as a teacher, farmer, fisherman, barman, fencing contractor, lecturer, Aboriginal language researcher, archaeological site worker and editor. In 2013, his novel, *Fog a Dox* won the 2013 Prime Ministers Literary Award for YA Fiction. In 2016, *Dark Emu* won the Book of the Year Award and was the co-winner of the Indigenous Writer's Prize in the NSW Premier's Literary Awards.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Geography

- Why did Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people develop deep knowledge about native Australian plants and animals? What sort of knowledge did this include? How can this knowledge be useful today in managing and protecting native flora and fauna, including endangered species?
- Take a look at the information and activities on the Bureau of Meteorology website about Indigenous weather seasons. <http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/index.shtml>
- Compare them to the European seasons that have been adopted in Australia.
- Referring to Chapter 3, identify the sorts of shelters Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people used in different regional contexts, during different weather seasons. How might the local landscape have influenced housing? How might the seasons have affected the types of houses built?
- Research contemporary examples of land management where fire is used based on traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practices, such as at Kakadu National Park.
- Investigate the traditional way Aboriginal people farmed or harvested kangaroos and the status of this primary industry today.
- Visit a local or nearby Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait islander cultural site and investigate how it is being maintained and managed.
- Research and identify the traditional hunting techniques and tools of Indigenous people living in or around your area.

History

- Working in two groups, role-play two separate discussions in colonial times about managing/caring for the land. One group should take on the perspective of Aboriginal elders, the other of new British settlers. Compare the two role-plays and the perspectives presented.
- Analyse some of the quotes and images in *Dark Emu* created by early explorers and settlers. Consider the context in which they were created. How reliable and useful are they as historical sources? What can they tell us about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and lifestyles at the time? What might they not tell us?
- The author, Bruce Pascoe, believes that the early settlers, authorities and explorers did not present evidence they had of Aboriginal farming techniques and established communities. Brainstorm the reasons why this information may not have been reported? What might have changed if this information had been widely known?



APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM F-10 (VERSION 8)

Year 9	History
	<p>Experiences of slaves, convicts and free settlers upon departure, their journey abroad, and their reactions on arrival, including the Australian experience (ACDSEH083)</p> <p>Changes in the way of life of a group(s) of people who moved to Australia in this period, such as free settlers on the frontier in Australia (ACDSEH084)</p> <p>The short and long-term impacts of the movement of peoples during this period (ACDSEH085)</p> <p>The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACDSEH020)</p> <p>Identify the origin, purpose and context of primary and secondary sources (ACHHS169)</p> <p>Evaluate the reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources (ACHHS171)</p> <p>Identify and analyse the perspectives of people from the past (ACHHS172)</p>
Year 10	Geography
	<p>Human-induced environmental changes that challenge sustainability (ACHGK070)</p> <p>Environmental world views of people and their implications for environmental management (ACHGK071)</p> <p>The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' approaches to custodial responsibility and environmental management in different regions of Australia (ACHGK072)</p>
Cross curriculum priorities	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, sustainability	
General capabilities	
Literacy, critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding	

