

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Dead Man's Gold

Michael Torres

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

A rollicking yarn that draws on the legends of the outback, featuring treasure hunting, droving, gold prospecting – and ghosts. Billy Stone heads out for a cattle muster but a stop at a waterhole in No-Man's Gorge leads to startling discoveries. Earthy illustrations bridge the gap between a children's picture book and upper primary reader.

- Australian outback adventure featuring ghosts, treasure hunting, droving and gold prospecting
- Bridges the gap between children's picture books and upper primary readers
- Vibrant, earthy illustrations throughout the book capture the essence of the Australian outback
- Encapsulates iconic images and themes of the Australian bushman and bush life

THEMES

- Gold prospecting
- Suspense
- Ghosts
- Cattle Droving
- Treasure Hunts
- Respect
- Courage
- Loneliness
- Australian Outback

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Dead Man's Gold is a beautifully crafted ghost story about Billy Stone, a drover who lays to rest a skeleton he finds at the bottom of a waterhole. The writing and narrative structure provides a quality text to introduce appreciation and analysis of literature for those emerging from picture books to chapter books. It is also a useful tool for modelling rising tension and characterisation with older students. Given its inclusion of skeletons and a ghost, it is advisable to consider the maturity of younger students before sharing this text with them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

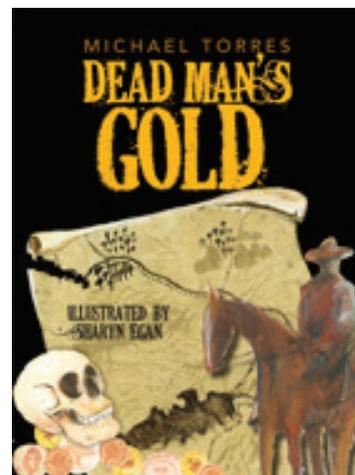


Michael Torres is a descendant of the Jabirr Jabirr people from the coastline between Broome and Beagle Bay on the Dampier Peninsula. He was the winner of both the 2004 and 2005 Dymocks Northern Territory Literary Award in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writer's section. Michael has worked in Indigenous affairs throughout the Kimberley and Northern Territory for many years. He is now a Senior Men's Outreach Worker with the Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter, managing the Indigenous Men's Service Project.



Sharyn Egan is a Noongar woman who, at the age of three, was taken from her family to the New Norcia Mission where she remained until the age of 13. She never saw her parents again.

Sharyn has participated in many exhibitions both as an artist and a curator. Her artwork is included in collections at the National Museum in Canberra, the Berndt Museum of Anthropology in Western Australia, the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and a number of local councils in and around Perth. Sharyn also works as an art lecturer at a TAFE college south of Perth teaching in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural arts program.



LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum:

Learning area

English

Year level

Years 3-6

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptors and cross-curriculum priorities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading, examine the front cover. What can we tell about the text from this cover? Make predictions about the setting and timeframe of this story. After reading the first chapter, briefly discuss your predictions.
- We are told in the first chapter that Billy Stone is a drover on a cattle station. What other clues do we get about the period and setting of *Dead Man's Gold* in this chapter?
- Reread the description of the willy willy as it approaches (pp 1-2). Discuss the language choices and tension raised by the author. Write your own description of a willy willy after viewing the following YouTube footage <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJ15GcEk00Y>
- How has Michael Torres used characterisation and imagery to create a vivid and captivating text? In what ways does he 'show not tell'?
- What was your first reaction to Billy finding the skeleton in the water? What would you have done if you were Billy? How does this unexpected turn of events drive the narrative?
- Why does Billy decide to bury the skeleton properly? How does he ensure the man's spirit can rest peacefully?
- Create some of the artefacts that Billy retrieves from the waterhole such as the tin filled with coins and gold nuggets and the leather pouch engraved with the treasure map. In groups of four, assume the roles of an interviewer, Billy, the old timer and One Arm Jack. Use these as props to generate questions and answers about the events that take place in *Dead Man's Gold*.
- With a friend, devise a list of props that could be used in your own original suspense-filled story. Plan this story on a story graph, before writing it.
- How can we tell the special bond that Billy has with his horse, Pindan? Why did the author decide to kill Pindan? How does this add to the tension?
- Why is Billy full of admiration for the donkey he calls Brave? What attribute does Brave have that Billy admires?
- In what ways is *Dead Man's Gold* a story about courage and respect?
- Why does Billy burn off the overgrown spinifex? What does this tell us about his skills as a bushman?
- Why does Billy give the old timer the silver pistol? What does this tell us about his character?
- Were you surprised that when he finds the tin of gold, Bill wants to share it with the old timer? How does this action deepen Billy's character and help propel the storyline?
- How has Sharyn Egan used facial expressions and mood to depict the different characters of Billy, the old timer and One Arm Jack?
- At what point did you realise that the old timer was the ghost of the body found in the waterhole? Discuss the way in which the author drip-feeds suspense into the narrative.
- When Billy and One Arm Jack drink to honour the old timer, how does the author foreshadow One Arm Jack's true intentions?
- How does Billy use his skills to track One Arm Jack? How does he give Jack his just desserts?
- What do you think is the main message in *Dead Man's Gold*?
- As you read *Dead Man's Gold*, discuss aspects of Aboriginal culture that are evident through Billy's actions, such as the importance of a proper burial, burning the overgrown spinifex and tracking One Arm Jack.
- Retell the story of *Dead Man's Gold* in your own words.
- Create character profiles of Billy, the old timer and One Arm Jack. How has the author created such three-dimensional characters?



- How do the illustrations throughout the text help to tell the story? Which is your favourite illustration? Why? Share with a friend.
- Imagine you are Billy. Write a journal entry describing your experience in *Dead Man's Gold*.
- Choose a descriptive passage from *Dead Man's Gold* to illustrate in a style similar to Sharyn Egan's.
- Write a review of *Dead Man's Gold*, including reference to way in which the illustrations help to tell this story and how the author has created suspense.
- Discuss how the author and illustrator have made this story exciting, moving and absorbing. How have they held the readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension?
- Identify and explain the characteristic text structures of *Dead Man's Gold*. Use a story graph to help map the plot.
- Rewrite *Dead Man's Gold* as a ballad.

APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
3	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways, and speculate on the authors' reasons (ACELT1594) • Discuss how language is used to describe the settings in texts, and explore how the settings shape the events and influence the mood of the narrative (ACELT1599) • Develop criteria for establishing personal preferences for literature (ACELT1598) • Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts, for example characterisation, rhyme, rhythm, mood, music, sound effects and dialogue(ACELT1791)
4	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories exciting, moving and absorbing and hold readers' interest by using various techniques, for example character development and plot tension (ACELT1605) • Discuss literary experiences with others, sharing responses and expressing a point of view (ACELT1603)
5	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (ACELT1608) • Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors (ACELT1798)
6	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots (ACELT1614) • Identify the relationship between words, sounds, imagery and language patterns in narratives and poetry such as ballads, limericks and free verse (ACELT1617) • Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways (ACELT1618)
<p>Cross-Curriculum Priorities</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture</p>	

