

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

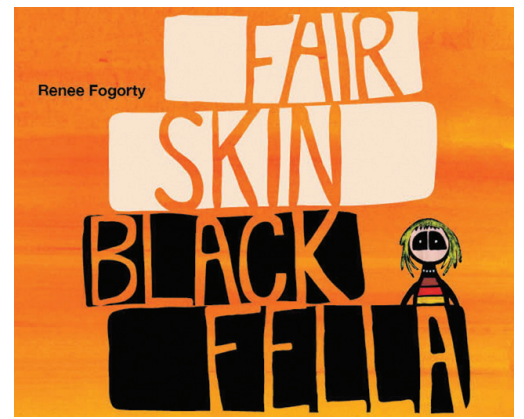
Fair Skin Black Fella

Written and illustrated by Renee Fogorty

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

'We all brothers and sisters in this life, no matter what colour we are,' says Old Ned.



This is the story of Mary, a young Aboriginal girl who lives on a red and dusty cattle station. Shunned by the other girls because of her fair skin, Old Ned, one of the community elders, finally speaks up. With words full of knowledge and wisdom, he teaches the girls that Aboriginal identity transcends skin colour and that family, community, country, culture and spirituality is what being Aboriginal is really about.

Renee Fogorty shows that prejudice has no boundaries and that it occurs within and between cultural groups. Her personal perspective makes *Fair Skin Black Fella* a tale of universal experience that many young readers will identify with. Renee's contemporary artwork is both whimsical and streetwise, and her colourful characters will appeal to readers of all ages.

- A heartwarming story about how it feels to look different
- Promotes acceptance of diversity
- Teaches children to listen to their elders
- Written by the author when she was in Year 12
- An important story about multiculturalism that is ideal for both upper primary and high school students
- A universal story for all cultures

THEMES

- Acceptance
- Identity
- Respect
- Loneliness/Friendship
- Aboriginal Culture (eg. role of Elders) and Artwork

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Written in first person, past tense, *Fair Skin Black Fella* explores the isolation that Mary experiences because she is labelled a 'half-caste'. It is aimed at an early childhood audience, although could certainly be used with older students given its subject matter. Through the rich and powerful illustrations, the text depicts the importance of a sense of belonging and acceptance, and the role that Elders play in Indigenous communities. Incorporating Wiradjuri language, it encourages readers to empathise with Mary as she identifies strongly with her Aboriginality. The written text is suitable to read-aloud as well as for independent readers.

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	Year level
English	Years F-3

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

CULTURAL NOTES

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





ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Renee Fogorty, a young Wiradjuri woman from Sydney, wrote and illustrated *Fair Skin Black Fella* as an assignment when she was a Year 12 student. Her own experiences growing up influenced her to write a non-confrontational story about the importance of belonging and acceptance that would explore the type of cultural identity issues that face young Australians.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading, discuss the title of the book and allow students to share with their friends what the term 'Fair Skin Black Fella' might mean.
- Using both the illustrations and the written text on the first page opening, discuss what we can tell about Mary and her family.
- On the second page opening, Mary and her family are encased by red dots. Later in the story when the girls become friends, they too are surrounded by dots. What do these dots represent?
- Mary says that 'in her heart she knew she was Aboriginal'. How do the illustrations show that it's what's on your inside that matters more than outward appearances?
- Discuss Old Ned's message to readers - 'We are all brothers and sisters in this life, no matter what colour we are.' As a class, create a mural on a classroom wall to illustrate this important theme.
- In a journal entry, respond to the following: 'It is how you feel in your heart and soul that is important.'
- We are told that Mary is a half-caste. What does this mean? What is the author communicating to her audience about this type of labelling?
- Discuss the role that Old Ned plays in *Fair Skin Black Fella*. How does he help Mary? How does he help Neli and Lana? What can you learn about friendship, acceptance and inclusion from Old Ned?
- Discuss the importance of Elders to Aboriginal culture. Why are they so respected within their communities? How does the illustration below represent the central role of elders and the way in which their wisdom and knowledge is revered by others?



- Although Lana and Neli think they can't play with Mary, the girls would actually have much in common. Make a list of the reasons why these girls should be friends.
- Discuss the page opening in which Mary begins to cry. How does the illustration show the way in which Lana and Neli are behaving towards Mary. Why are the symbols in the top left and right corners of the illustration moving away from Mary? How do these symbols change direction later in the book when the girls become friends?
- What do you think are the main messages of *Fair Skin Black Fella*? What is the author's purpose in writing this story?
- Together as a class, construct criteria for what makes a good friend.
- Have you ever felt lonely or isolated like Mary? Write a reflection to share a time when you too needed some help from a wise person with friendship issues.
- How do the illustrations convey the characters' emotions, even though we can only see their eyes? How is body language and colour used to express feelings?
- In small groups, retell the story of *Fair Skin Black Fella*, either by creating a dramatized version or by re-writing it in your own words.
- Have you ever been teased by other children, or been the one to tease others? Write a reflection that shares what *Fair Skin Black Fella* teaches about acceptance and friendship.
- The text uses Wiradjuri words, for example, guuni for mother and babeen for father. What is the Aboriginal language in your local area? Create a word wall for the classroom that shares your local language. A map of Aboriginal Nations can be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/>
- Create your own illustrated page opening suitable for inclusion in *Fair Skin Black Fella*, using the style of Renee Fogorty's artwork in your illustrations. Where would you place your additional page within the structure of the text?
- Which is your favourite page opening in *Fair Skin Black Fella*? Why? Share your ideas with a friend.

APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
F	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences (ACELT1575) • Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (ACELT1783) • Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a text (ACELT1578)
1	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss features of plot, character and setting in different types of literature and explore some features of characters in different texts (ACELT1584) • Innovate on familiar texts by using similar characters, repetitive patterns or vocabulary (ACELT1832) • Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication (ACELT1586)
2	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created (ACELT1587) • Discuss the characters and settings of different texts and explore how language is used to present these features in different ways (ACELT1591) • Innovate on familiar texts by experimenting with character, setting or plot (ACELT1833)
3	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596)
Cross-Curriculum Priority – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures	

