

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Free Diving

Written by Lorrae Coffin

Illustrated by Bronwyn Houston



Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

Free Diving is a poignant tribute to the 'blackbirding' of Aboriginal men and women exploited by the pearling industry as 'free divers' in the late nineteenth century in Western Australia. There were no protective suits and with every descent, divers faced the terrifying threat of the bends, shark attack or being shipwrecked in a cyclone. Under the control of indifferent European lugger owners, many men and women forced to dive for the valuable pearl shell lost their lives and never made it home to family.

The fictionalised lyrical narrative is based on the celebrated song 'Free Diving' by singer-songwriter Lorrae Coffin. It sensitively reflects the emotional journey of a young man who leaves family and country to work on a lugger with Japanese and Malay divers by his side. Bronwyn Houston's illustrations are a deep-sea celebration that illuminate both the glory of the ocean and the extreme dangers encountered by the free divers.

- Introduces an important chapter of our national story
- Classic design with full-colour and sepia interpretations of the artwork
- Includes reproduction of the song lyrics and sheet music
- Well-suited to the Australian Curriculum for early childhood

THEMES

- Pearling Industry - History
- Aboriginal Histories

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

The lyrics of Lorrae Coffin's song *Free Diving* form the basis for this text, illustrated by Bronwyn Houston. Although the subject matter is more suited to a middle primary audience, it also has applications to early childhood, as the language, exploration of the sea and visual literacy components can be tailored to different ages. Furthermore, the musical aspect allows for the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music at a range of year levels.

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-4
HASS (History)	Year 4
The Arts (Music)	Years 3-4

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities 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



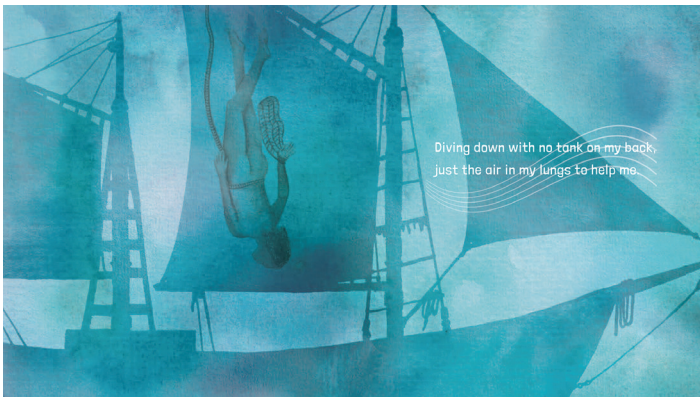
Lorrae Coffin is a descendant of the Nyiyaparli and Yindjibarndi people of the Pilbara in Western Australia. She is an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, singer-songwriter and a co-founder of the internationally acclaimed Marrugeku Company, a leader in intercultural dance theatre. She is recognised throughout Australia for her knowledge of the Indigenous Arts Music Industry. *Free Diving* is her first book.



Bronwyn Houston is a descendant of the Nyiyaparli and Yindjibarndi people of the Pilbara in Western Australia. She grew up in Broome and finds her creative inspiration in the natural world. Bronwyn has written and illustrated several books including *Return of the Dinosaurs* (Magabala Books, 2016). *Free Diving* is the first collaboration with her Aunty Lorrae.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Look carefully at the first and last page openings. Discuss the fact that they are sepia in colour and framed in old-fashioned borders. How does this help share the historical setting and context of the pearl diving industry?
- How do the illustrations help share the majesty of the ocean? Why is it so unimaginable that such a beautiful environment was also the location of such harsh treatment of Aboriginal people?
- Discuss the figurative language used in the text. How does such language contribute to the telling of this story?
- Imagine having to leave your loved ones to work for free in such horrendous circumstances, not knowing if you would ever see your family again? In the role of the main character or one of his family, write a reflection that shares what it is like to say goodbye.
- Choose one of Bronwyn Houston's illustrations to recreate, using a similar style. Display these creations in the classroom.
- Discuss the expressions on the faces of the Malaysian and Japanese men as they watch the protagonist diving for pearls. What do their faces tell us about the dangers faced by Aboriginal divers?
- Use a graphic organiser to compare the two page openings below.



- Discuss the shape of the words 'I'm free diving, into the water I go' on the page openings below. How are these pages similar to and different from one another in terms of what is happening at the respective stages of the narrative? Why is this repetition effective?



- Using websites and video clips about the history of pearl diving in Australia, take notes about this practice. How and why were practices different for Aboriginal people when compared with other divers? What dangers were faced by divers? What equipment would non-Aboriginal divers have used?
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2ShP_Aoh3I
 - <http://www.nationalgeographic.com.au/videos/the-secret-life-of-pearls/the-dangers-of-pearl-diving-4037.aspx>
 - <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/australias-pearling-industry>
 - <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/stories/2012/07/05/3539781.htm> (NB - This is a Four Corners episode - teachers should view first and select appropriate extracts)
- Why does the diver's body feel like ice? How has the illustrator used visual literacy to tenderly show that the diver has drowned?
- *Free Diving* addresses the nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the Europeans, and the effects these interactions had on Indigenous people. How do you feel when you hear about this part of our history? Why? Write a reflection to share your feelings.
- Discuss the music scores that feature on the page openings. Why have these been included in the illustrations?
- How important is it that episodes like the 'blackbirding' of Aboriginal people in the Pearl Diving industry be transposed into music? Why do you think Lorrae Coffin chose to tell this story via song?
- With older grades, try playing the song using the musical score at the end of the text.



APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	
F	<p>English: 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) <p>The Arts (Music)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to music and consider where and why people make music, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMUR083)
1	<p>English: Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to, recite and perform poems, chants, rhymes and songs, imitating and inventing sound patterns including alliteration and rhyme (ACELT1585) Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication (ACELT1586) <p>The Arts (Music)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to music and consider where and why people make music, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMUR083)
2	<p>English: 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) <p>The Arts (Music)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond to music and consider where and why people make music, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMUR083)
3	<p>English: Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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) <p>The Arts (Music)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify intended purposes and meanings as they listen to music using the elements of music to make comparisons, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMUR087)
4	<p>English: Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602) <p>HASS (History)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example, people and environments (ACHASSK086) <p>The Arts (Music)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify intended purposes and meanings as they listen to music using the elements of music to make comparisons, starting with Australian music, including music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAMUR087)
<p>Cross curriculum priorities</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</p>	

