

## Homecoming

written by Elfie Shiosaki

### OVERVIEW

*Homecoming* pieces together fragments of stories from four generations of Noongar women and explores how they navigated the changing landscapes of colonisation, protectionism, and assimilation to hold their families together. This seminal collection of poetry, prose and historical colonial archives, tells of unending love for children—those that were present, those taken, those hidden and those that ultimately stood in the light.

*Homecoming* engages an intergenerational dialogue about Country, kin and culture. This elegant and extraordinary form of storywork and restorative truth-telling amplifies Aboriginal women's voices and enables four generations of women to speak for themselves. This sublime debut highlights the tenacity of family as well as First Nation's agency to resist, survive and renew.

Elfie Shiosaki has restored humanity and power to her family in this beautifully articulated collection and has given voice to those silenced by our brutal past.

- Highly anticipated debut collection.
- Universal themes of love, belonging, place, family and culture under draconian government policies.
- Restorative story work from colonial archives with sensitive interplay between the present and the past.
- Powerful reading for those that would like to know about First Nations history, poetry, voice and agency.
- Well suited to teen and adult readers.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Elfie Shiosaki is a Noongar and Yawuru writer. She is a Lecturer in Indigenous Rights at the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia, and was Editor of Indigenous Writing at Westerly from 2017-2021. Elfie is the co-editor of *maar bidi: next generation black writing* (Magabala Books, 2020). *Homecoming* is her first solo collection.

### THEMES

- Aboriginal Peoples - Histories and Culture
  - Country; Stories; Kinship
- Love; Belonging
- Family; Grandmothers
- Settler-Colonisation
- Equality



### WRITING STYLE

Told in three sections, *Homecoming* is a collection of powerfully written free-verse and prose pieces that interweave archival material, spoken histories and recontextualised experiences to connect readers with stories is personalised through Elfie Shiosaki's carefully curated sources and evocative writing style, as well as the integration of the Noongar language. There is a tenderness to this text, even as it is set amidst the ever-present effects of settler-colonialism, especially those incited by the Aboriginal Act of 1905. Readers emerge with a sense of connection and hope for the future; they are invited to engage in the importance of Country, stories and family lines to truly value and respect Aboriginal culture. *Homecoming* shares multiple perspectives through its inclusion of letters, paintings, excerpts from recorded stories and reimagined narratives, giving audiences the space to infer, question and draw their own conclusions. This creates a text that is both absorbing and provocative. Although its subject matter is mature, the verses are extremely accessible and the writing clear and meaningful, making it is as applicable to young adult audiences as it is to adults.

## LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum, as well as various Senior Secondary English and Modern History Syllabuses in most Australian States and Territories:

Learning area	Year level
Australian Curriculum: English	Years 8-10
Senior Secondary English	Years 11-12
Senior Secondary Modern History	Years 11-12

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

- *Homecoming* uses multiple perspectives, sources and timeframes to share one family's experiences that have similarly been felt by countless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is told in three parts: resist, survive and renew. As you read, record the subject matter and perspectives of the poems in each section. Consider why the text has been structured in this way.
- Create a family tree and story map to help contextualise the stories. Add Noongar words and their meanings to the story map.
- The first poem, *Story Tree*, establishes not only Olive's voice, but those of the generations that follow. How are Olive's experiences integrated with those of her descendants?
- Compare Edward Harris' letter on p14 with the verses written from his perspective. Why have the verses been formatted and worded as they have?
- What does the copy of Olive's handwriting on p15 reveal about the white settler approach to Aboriginal children? In what ways does this writing sample antithesise Olive's nature?
- Elfie Shiosaki has a very evocative writing style. Discuss her use of figurative language in pieces such as *Rain Will Come* (p17) and *Grandmother* (p91-93). How is the voice in these pieces complementary to those in the verses? Sketch the scene depicted in one of these pieces.
- Analyse *Blood Dreaming* (pp 19-22), *Blood Love* (pp 49-53) and *Blood Instinct* (pp 69-90). Why do these poems have multiple chapters? How do they frame the rest of the stories in *Homecoming*? Which of these poems ignites the strongest reaction in you? Why?
- Discuss the use of free verse in *Homecoming*. Why is this such a powerful literary device? How has it been used to create clarity and a direct discourse? Discuss the use of line breaks and the absence of full stops in creating meaning.
- What is the significance of the 'southerly' throughout *Homecoming*? What does this share with us about Aboriginal culture?
- Discuss the choice of vocabulary in *Sir* on p26. Why have these words been chosen? Justify the inclusion of each word.
- In *Grandfather*, we are told that 'her grandfather was a dignified man/he believed all people were equal/and he was equal to any other person' (p27). How is equality versus inequality illustrated throughout *Homecoming*? In the role of Edward Harris, create and perform a monologue based on the theme of equality.
- How have figurative features been used to create a sense of peace and belonging whenever Koorlang is with Ngarnk?
- How does *Venus*, starting on p33, give agency to Olive, and therefore to her descendants? Why aren't there depictions of her like this in the archives?
- Discuss 'Tidal Race' (pp 35-36). In what ways do Olive and her descendants endure a 'turbulent' ocean?
- Why has the author included raw data from Olive Harris' Personal History Card from the Aborigines Department in *Records of Slavery* (pp37-38)? How does doing so give readers the space to make inferences about white Australia's treatment of Aboriginal people?
- Discuss your understanding of the Stolen Generation. Use picture books such as *Stolen Girl* (Magabala Books) by Trina Saffioti and *Norma MacDonald and Kunyi* (Magabala Books) by Kunyi June Anne McInerney to explore this further.
- In *Blood Love*, starting on p49, Olive is filled with optimism and hope for the future. How is this so easily eroded by the actions of Helen's father? How did you react to this poem when you read it? Share in a reflection.
- In *Starry*, why does the author say: 'I hold on to this sadness/to tell your story/if I let it go/I lose you/my sky full of stars' (p54)? How does this sadness help strengthen her connections with kin?
- What does *Wandoo Whistling* (pp62-68) share about the survival mechanisms put into place by Aboriginal people post-colonialism? How is this symbolised by Helen's family surviving on 'sprouted/onions and potatoes' thrown out by shop-keepers (p68)?



## CLASSROOM IDEAS CONT.

- Examine the use of poetic devices in *Blood Instinct* starting on p69. How is imagery used to evoke urgency and empathy?
- Why doesn't Helen feel very good about herself when 'put up on that table/everyone's saying how clean I was/for an Aborigine' (p75)? How does this typify attitudes towards Indigenous people at the time? Why is it important that this be highlighted today? Discuss.
- Using the evidence and sentiments in *Not Equal* (p80+), write and deliver a persuasive speech about 'Closing the Gap'. Include recent data to support your arguments.
- In the Introduction, Mary Alice Harris is described as having 'cultural fluency' between many worlds. What is meant by this term? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- How does the motif of stars show the interconnectedness between generations of Aboriginal women?
- How is the weitch, or emu, pivotal to *Homecoming*?
- In a reflection, share how you are felt after reading *Homecoming*. Why do you feel this way? How have your previous thoughts about colonisation and the subsequent treatment of First Nations people been challenged?
- How are the ancestral waterways of the family a recurring motif in *Homecoming*?
- In the role of Edward Harris, write your own letter to AO Neville.
- How does the description of Helen's grandmother on p92 show the importance of maternal relationships to Aboriginal culture?
- Why has the service of Aboriginal soldiers during war time been included in *Homecoming*? How does this reveal further inequalities between white and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians?
- Why does Helen just want 'to be accepted by everybody' (p109)? How is it that she is placed in two different cultural spaces, yet feels she doesn't belong to either?
- Reread *Lost in Archive* starting on p113. How does this poem epitomise the importance of stories? How does pouring through the archives of her grandmothers help to 'take [the author] home' (p114)?
- What does Koorlang's dream about the 'great white cloud over the horizon' symbolise (p117)?
- Reread the testimonies given by Mary Alice Harris to the 1934 Commission. Summarise her points and recommendations. Discuss the importance of her having such agency during this era. How does this, together with the poem *Mary Alice* starting on p130, reflect the very essence of Elfie Shiosaki's text?
- In a reflection, share your response to the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were 'required by the law of their government to work In the Land/Of Their Birth' (p131).
- Analyse how the language features and formatting of *Now* on p134 create such a powerful message to readers.
- Reread *Which Way* on pp137-138. How has the author synthesised the narrative's threads together in this very poignant conclusion to *Homecoming*?
- Who is the audience for *Homecoming*? How do you know this? Support your thinking with evidence from the text.
- Discuss what the author has achieved in *Homecoming*. How she has done this and why?
- The author often refers to using living katitjin, or knowledge, to find her bidi (way) home. How does connecting with the archived material help her to find her way home? With that in mind, what is the significance of the title *Homecoming*? Refer also to the author's poem in the Introduction.
- In what ways does Elfie Shiosaki empower her family by giving her foremothers a voice?
- In response to one of the recordings from Olive or Helen, write your own piece of third person prose to reflect their story.
- Create your own free verse piece to share your understanding of Elfie Shiosaki's message in *Homecoming*.
- Why has *Homecoming* been described as a 'restorative historiography'? How does it give First Nations people agency?
- Find out more about the Native Union, which William and Edward Harris both helped to establish.
- Conduct research about the Aborigines Act of 1905. Why was this deemed a Protection Act? Why was it such a disastrous policy for First Nations people?



## AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

Year	Curriculum Area
9	<p><b>English Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (<a href="#">ACELT1633</a>)</li><li>Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author’s literary style (<a href="#">ACELT1636</a>)</li></ul> <p><b>History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACDSEH020</a>)</li></ul>
10	<p><b>English Language</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people (<a href="#">ACELA1564</a>)</li></ul> <p><b>Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (<a href="#">ACELT1639</a>)</li><li>Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (<a href="#">ACELT1812</a>)</li><li>Compare and evaluate how ‘voice’ as a literary device can be used in a range of different types of texts such as poetry to evoke particular emotional responses (<a href="#">ACELT1643</a>)</li><li>Reflect on, extend, endorse or refute others’ interpretations of and responses to literature (<a href="#">ACELT1640</a>)</li></ul> <p><b>History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Students investigate struggles for human rights in depth. This will include how rights and freedoms have been ignored, demanded or achieved in Australia and in the broader world context. Background to the struggle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for rights and freedoms before 1965, including the 1938 Day of Mourning and the Stolen Generations (<a href="#">ACDSEH104</a>)</li><li>The significance of the following for the civil rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: 1962 right to vote federally; 1967 Referendum; Reconciliation; Mabo decision; Bringing Them Home Report (the Stolen Generations), the Apology (<a href="#">ACDSEH106</a>)</li><li>Methods used by civil rights activists to achieve change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the role of ONE individual or group in the struggle (<a href="#">ACDSEH134</a>)</li><li>The continuing nature of efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world, such as the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) (<a href="#">ACDSEH143</a>)</li></ul> <p><b>Civics and Citizenship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How Australia’s international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACHCK093</a>)</li></ul>
<p><b>Cross-Curriculum Priorities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture</li></ul>	

