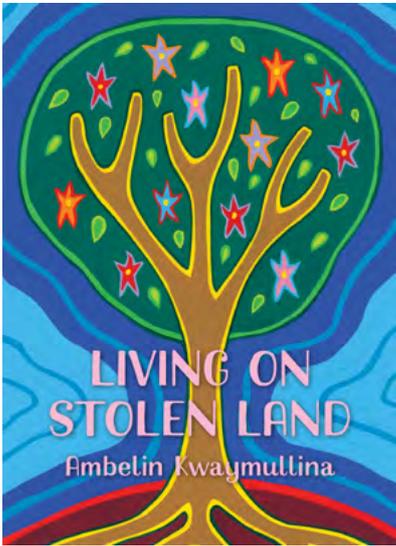




Living on Stolen Land

written by Ambelin Kwaymullina

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler



OVERVIEW

Living on Stolen Land is a prose-style look at our settler-colonial present. This book is the first of its kind to address and educate a broad audience about the colonial history of Australia, in a highly original way. It pulls apart the myths at the heart of our nationhood, and challenges Australia to come to terms with its own past and its place within and on 'Indigenous Countries'. This title speaks to many First Nations' truths; stolen lands, sovereignties, time, decolonisation, First Nations perspectives, systemic bias and other constructs that inform our present discussions and ever-expanding understanding. This title is a timely, thought-provoking and accessible read.

- Prose-style text that informs conversations around reconciliation, decolonisation and truth-telling
- Talks to the restructuring of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, in an accessible manner
- Strong social, cultural and political messages
- Vital contribution to current discussions about race, place, land and ownership

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Ambelin Kwaymullina belongs to the Palyku people of the eastern Pilbara region of Western Australia. She is a writer, illustrator and law academic who works across a range of genres including YA, science fiction, verse and non-fiction.

THEMES

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples Peoples - Histories and Culture
- Country
- Respect
- Relationships
- Decolonisation
- Settler-Colonisation
- Sovereignty

WRITING STYLE

Living on Stolen Land is a collection of powerfully written critical reflections that identify and dismantle fundamental concepts around settler-colonialism and its present day manifestations. It offers insights into settler-colonial history, Indigenous knowledge systems, and the pathways to successful reconciliation and decolonisation. It does this by breaking down critical themes, concepts and misconceptions surrounding structures, systems and enduring patterns of settler-colonial thought and behaviour. Through her writing, Ambelin Kwaymullina invites readers to deeply engage in the many and varied First Nations' cultures, including the interconnectivity with Country that is pivotal to the longevity and sustainability of Indigenous ways. As such, Ambelin's perspective produces a text that is truly absorbing and provocative, allowing readers to collaboratively construct just futures. Although its subject matter is sophisticated and mature, the verses are extremely accessible and the writing clear and meaningful; and as such can be engaged with by younger readers.

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

ART AND STORYTELLING

- The first verse of *Living on Stolen Land* describes the symbolism of the front cover's artwork. There is also artwork throughout the book. Why do you think the author has chosen to include artwork? What does it add to the text?
- Choose a section of *Living on Stolen Land*. Create a piece of artwork that represents that section. Which do you think is a more powerful way to express ideas, art or text?
- For thousands of years art in many forms (including paintings, jewellery and sculpture) has been an important part of Indigenous societies. How do Indigenous peoples use art to tell stories and to sustain their cultures and histories? Research using a resource such as one of the following:
 - <http://www.canningstockrouteproject.com>
 - <https://www.apyartcentrecollective.com>
 - <https://koorieheritagetrust.com.au/whats-on/kht-online/kht-exhibitions-online/>
 - <https://www.qagoma.qld.gov.au/learn/collection/indigenous-australia>
 - <https://maningrida.com>
 - <https://www.sydneybarani.com.au/themes/visual-arts/>
 - <https://kanalaritja.tmag.tas.gov.au>

STRUCTURE, VERSE AND THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

- *Living on Stolen Land* is told in four parts: *You Are on Indigenous Land*, *Perspectives*, *The Long Con and Pathways*. As you read, record the subject matter of the verse in each section. Why do you think the text has been structured in this way?
- Discuss the use of free verse in *Living on Stolen Land*. Why is this such a powerful device? How has it been used to create clarity and a direct discourse? Compare with other verse books/poetry such as Ali Cobby Eckermann, *Ruby Moonlight* (Magabala Books); Alison Whitaker, *Blakwork* (Magabala Books) and Ellen van Neerven, *Throat* (UQP).
- *Living on Stolen Land* refers to 'just futures'. What do you think a just future would look like? Individually, in groups or as a class, come up with an idea for a just future. Express this idea in (a) prose and (b) verse. Which do you think is the more difficult form of expression to construct? Which form better conveys the idea?
- Throughout the text the author asks questions eg 'You are living on stolen land/what can you do about it' (p 6); '... then what are the pathways/by which such tales/can be created (p 11); '...asking yourself/what is a respectful way to contribute' (p 51). Why do you think the author does this? Do you think this is an effective way of communicating ideas? Why/why not?
- Ambelin Kwaymullina's voice is instantly arresting, drawing readers into the text with her clarity and evocative language choices. Discuss the importance of a strong sense of voice in writing. How has this been achieved?
- Who is the audience for *Living on Stolen Land*? How do you know this?
- *Living on Stolen Land* goes to great lengths to emphasise the central place of Country to Indigenous cultures. As you read the text, keep note of the many ways in which the author expresses this. Write a reflection to share the interconnectedness that the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations have with Country, identity and culture.
- What have you learnt about yourself through reading *Living on Stolen Land*? Share in a reflection.
- Create your own verse to share your understanding of Ambelin Kwaymullina's message in *Living on Stolen Land*.

SECTION 1 – YOU ARE ON INDIGENOUS LAND

- What do you think the author means by 'frontier apocalypses' and 'protectionism dystopias' (p5)? Discuss. NB: for some resources that deal with Indigenous experiences of the frontier and the protectionism eras see:
 - <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/first-encounters-and-frontier-conflict>
 - <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/explainer/what-were-frontier-wars>
 - <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/>
 - <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/explainer/explainer-stolen-generations>
 - <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collections/collections-online/digitised-collections/remove-and-protect>
 - <https://bth.humanrights.gov.au>
 - <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/subject/stolen-wages>



CLASSROOM IDEAS CONTINUED.

- We are told that Aboriginal peoples resisted ‘in ways seen/and ways unseen’ (p6). What is meant by this?
- Why does the author say ‘there is no place of innocence/for Settlers to stand’ (p6)?
- What do we learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and their systems in *Sovereignities* (pp7-11)? What helps define sovereignty? What role does story play in this?
- What is ‘*terra nullius*’ (p9)? How is this part of the story of settler-colonial sovereignty? NB: for a useful discussion of the concept of terra nullius see:
→ <https://www.fedcourt.gov.au/digital-law-library/judges-speeches/justice-jagot/jagot-j-20171020>
- Using the example of the kangaroo in *Sovereignities*, describe the different views that Aboriginal peoples and Settlers had about the environment when Australia was colonised. Do you think Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples still have different views about the environment? How have settler understandings of the Australian environment changed since colonisation?
- In a reflection, share how you are feeling after reading *Sovereignities*. Why do you feel this way? Have your previous thoughts and behaviours about colonisation been challenged? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How are Indigenous and Settler concepts of time different? Why has this caused difficulties for Indigenous peoples?
- What does the author mean when she says ‘Life doesn’t move through time/Time moves through life’ (14)? What other references to time are made throughout the book and how do these relate to Indigenous concepts of time (see eg p 24, 25, 57 and 60).
- After reading *Decolonisation* (pp15-16), discuss how the author thinks decolonisation can successfully be achieved. Choose a particular structure (eg your school, a sporting organisation or social club you belong to, or a local, state or federal government). Do you consider the structure you have chosen to be based in respect for Indigenous sovereignties? If not, how might you change it?

SECTION TWO – PERSPECTIVES

- After reading *Principles* (pp19-20), discuss the differences and commonalities between different Indigenous peoples. Why is this important to understand?
- Consider how differences between holistic and reductionistic thinking (p 21 onwards) shape the ways in which people understand the world. What are the differences in how reductionist and holistic thinkers would explain the environment? What are some of the consequences of this for environmental management?
- After reading *Processes*, try to identify some of the differences between process-focussed systems and results-focussed systems. Do you think your education at school is process-based or results-based (or a mix of both)? Which system would you prefer, and why?
- Using evidence from the text, respond to the following statement: Connections and relationships create processes that allow life to continue.
- What does the author mean by ‘All knowledge/is limited by positionality/and governed by relationships’ (p26)?
- After reading *Knowing* (pp26-27), offer suggestions to the Government as to how adopting the Indigenous system of ‘learning to read the signs’ could help with the management of an environmental issue such as bushfires. NB: for resources on Indigenous knowledge and bushfires see:
→ <https://time.com/5764521/australia-bushfires-indigenous-fire-practices/>
→ https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=RM72NtXxyLs&feature=emb_logo
→ <https://theconversation.com/strength-from-perpetual-grief-how-aboriginal-people-experience-the-bushfire-crisis-129448>

SECTION THREE – THE LONG CON

- Giving examples to support your ideas, write an explanation of what Ambelin Kwaymullina calls ‘The Long Con’ (pp31-47).
- Why, when challenged, does settler-colonisation ‘begin to lose its power’ (p32)? How does challenging in this way help engage the ‘decolonising processes’ (p35)?
- Why does the author describe the settler-colonialism’s march as ‘merely a few steps/compared to the thousands of seasons/for which Indigenous peoples/have loved their lands’ (p31)?



CLASSROOM IDEAS CONTINUED.

- Explain the ‘artificial context’ (pp33-35). Why is it wrong in ‘two ways’?
- As a class, establish definitions for structural, explicit and unconscious bias, giving examples of each. How do these work together? How can bias be controlled or defeated (pp36-41)?
- Make an infographic that explains the three forms of bias.
- Research the concept of ‘unconscious bias’ Do you think you have any unconscious biases? If so, what are they and how can you address them? NB: for resources on unconscious bias see:
 - https://www.sbs.com.au/sites/sbs.com.au/home/files/sbs_learn_study_guide_cultural_competence_program_m4.pdf
 - <https://www.forgov.qld.gov.au/unconscious-biases>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VGbwNI6Ssk>
- What does the author mean by ‘Change-makers understand/the colonisers occupy space/and decolonisers yield it’ (p 47)?. What are some of the ways in which change-makers could ‘yield space’ to Indigenous peoples?

SECTION FOUR – PATHWAYS

- How would you describe the importance of humility in providing pathways for ‘just futures’? (See pp51-53.) What does humility look, feel and sound like? How does it help ‘navigate/the complexities of building respectful relationships/ with Indigenous peoples/Indigenous sovereignties/on stolen land’ (p51)?
- How is listening ‘done right’ (pp54-57)? How does silence also speak?
- In what ways can thinking about the ‘how’ allow decolonisation to occur (pp58-63)? What do the following language choices from the verse have to do with this: free, prior, informed?
- Describe your understanding of a ‘strength-based approach’ to decolonisation (p62).
- How can ‘partners on pathways’ lead to ‘joy/[and] wonders’ (pp62-63)?
- How does the verse *Futures* offer hope for transformation (p64)?
- Respond to the final stanza of *Living on Stolen Land* in a mode of your choice: Decolonised futures/are what we create/together (p64).
- As suggested on p41, ‘seek out the works/of Indigenous authors/playwrights/dancers/singers/Elders/ [and] communities’ to engage with the stories that Indigenous people tell about themselves. (See the Magabala Books website for an extensive range of works by Aboriginal authors and illustrators, many of which include Teacher Notes.)

| Year | Curriculum Area |
|------|--|
| 8 | <p>English Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the ways that ideas and viewpoints in literary texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts may reflect or challenge the values of individuals and groups (ACELT1626) • Explore the interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors (ACELT1806) • Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts (ACELT1807) <p>Civics and Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The types of law in Australia, including criminal law and civil law, and the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customary law (ACHCK064) • Different perspectives about Australia’s national identity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and what it means to be Australian (ACHCK066) |



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|---|---|
| <p>9</p> | <p>English Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1633) Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author’s literary style (ACELT1636) <p>History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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>10</p> | <p>English Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand how language use can have inclusive and exclusive social effects, and can empower or disempower people (ACELA1564) Literature Compare and evaluate a range of representations of individuals and groups in different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1639) Evaluate the social, moral and ethical positions represented in texts (ACELT1812) 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 (ACELT1643) Reflect on, extend, endorse or refute others’ interpretations of and responses to literature (ACELT1640) <p>History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 (ACDSEH104) 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 (ACDSEH106) 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 (ACDSEH134) 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) (ACDSEH143) <p>Civics and Citizenship</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How Australia’s international legal obligations shape Australian law and government policies, including in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHCK093) |
| <p>Cross-Curriculum Priorities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture | |

