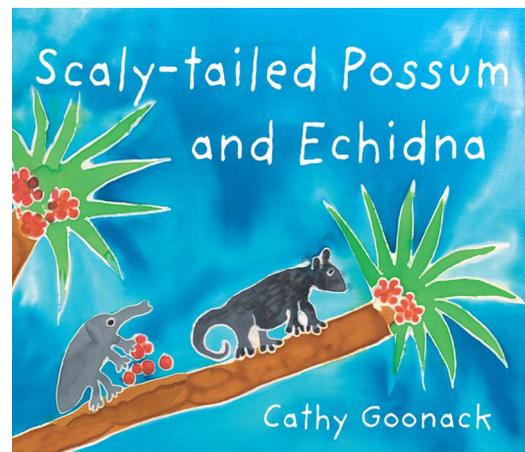


# Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

## Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna

Written by Cathy Goonack

Illustrated by Myron Goonack,  
Katrina Goonack and Marlene Goonack



Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

### OVERVIEW

This engaging story tells how the possum got its scaly tail and the echidna got its spikes. Passed down from generation to generation, this is a traditional Dreamtime story.

*Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna* features two iconic Australian animals; the scaly-tailed possum, found only in a remote part of the Kimberley, and one of Australia's most unusual mammals, the echidna.

Vividly illustrated with paintings on silk, this Dreamtime story includes detailed descriptions and photographs of the scaly-tailed possum and the echidna. It also tells of the Wandjina, the Creator and Great Spirit, an important part of Aboriginal dreamtime stories from the Kimberley.

- A delightful tale about two unusual Australian animals
- A traditional story told in an engaging and contemporary way
- A good introduction to non-Indigenous children about Dreamtime stories
- Illustrated with beautiful silk paintings
- Includes educational information and photographs of the scaly-tailed possum and the echidna

### THEMES

- Dreaming
- Aboriginal Art
- Storytelling
- Spirituality
- Consequences
- Greed

### AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

*Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna* is a Dreamtime story of the Wunambal people. It explains how the scaly-tailed possum and echidna got their unique physical features. After stealing Possum's food, Echidna is punished by Wandjina, the great spirit of Wunambal. A morality tale that explores the consequences of greed, it is suitable for early childhood audiences. Written in third person, past tense, this story has been passed down through generations of the author's family; the beautiful illustrations created by her children add to this family tradition and add a rich layer of storytelling to the text.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATORS

**Cathy Goonack** is a descendant of the Wunambal people and part of the Kandiwal tribe from Ngauwudu land, near the Mitchell Plateau. She grew up in Derby and moved to Adelaide to finish her education.

Cathy has six children and lives on her grandfather's country, at Kandiwal Community, near the Mitchell Falls. She works with the kindergarten children and loves to go fishing in her free time. Cathy's grandfather passed this story down to her.

**Marlene, Myron and Katrina Goonack** all attended Kimberley School of the Air at Kandiwal for their primary and secondary education. They have worked together to produce art for many of their family's stories and believe it is important to learn about their culture and pass it on to people all over Australia.



## 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-1; 3
Science	Year 1

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

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### English

- Before reading *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna*, observe the animals on the front cover. What do you notice about the echidna and the possum? How are these images different from the title of the book? Make predictions about the story given this discrepancy.
- The author tells us in her notes that she inherited this story from her grandfather. Discuss the importance of storytelling in Aboriginal culture. Why is it significant that Cathy Goonack has shared this story with a wider audience by writing this book? What role do her children's illustrations play in this storytelling tradition?
- What motivates the echidna to take possum's food? Why doesn't he stop to consider that this belongs to someone else? Have you ever done something without considering the consequences? What lessons did you learn from this experience?
- In your own words, explain the main message of *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna*.
- In the role of Echidna, write a reflection that shares what you have learnt from this experience. How do you feel about the punishment given to you by Wandjina?
- Retell *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna* in your own words, either by using a voice recording app or by writing it.
- Which is your favourite page opening? Why? Share with a friend.
- How important is storytelling and respecting the legacy of stories that are handed down through families? What stories have been handed down in your family? Retell one of these stories to a small group of classmates.
- In small groups, create your own moralistic tale that explains how another native Australian animal got its distinctive physical feature. Illustrate in a style similar to that of *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna*.
- Collect other stories from the Dreaming that share stories of spirituality, creation or life lessons. Compare these with *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna*. How are they similar and different from one another? One such story is *The Mark of the Wargal* by Lorna Little. (See the trailer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3xzcH10Gdl>).
- Create a glossary that explains the terms in *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna* such as Wunambal, Kandiwal, Wandjina, walkabout and Dreaming.
- View images of pandanus on the internet. Compare these with the illustrations in *Scaly-tailed Possum and Echidna*. Make your own sketches of these plants. Why is this plant a perfect choice for this story?
- What do you think Possum would have done when he went walkabout?
- Possum and Echidna's altercation escalates quickly, rather than being resolved peacefully. What advice would you give them about solving problems in the future?
- The author mentions in her notes that she works with children who attend the Kimberley School of the Air. Her children also completed their schooling in this way. Find out more about this school at the following link: <https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/overview.do?schoolID=5928&pageID=SO01>

### Science

- Read the information and view the photographs of the scaly-tailed possum and echidna at the back of the text. Combine this information with further research about these animals, including their appearance, habitat, diet and behaviour. Present your findings in an information report or an oral to your class.



## APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
<b>F</b>	<p><b>English</b></p> <p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories and informative texts (<a href="#">ACELA1786</a>)</li> </ul> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences (<a href="#">ACELT1575</a>)</li> <li>• Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (<a href="#">ACELT1783</a>)</li> <li>• Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a <a href="#">text</a> (<a href="#">ACELT1578</a>)</li> <li>• Retell familiar literary texts through performance, use of illustrations and images (<a href="#">ACELT1580</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<p><b>English</b></p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how authors <a href="#">create</a> characters using language and images (<a href="#">ACELT1581</a>)</li> <li>• Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences (<a href="#">ACELT1582</a>)</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Science</b></p> <p>Biological Sciences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living things have a variety of external features (<a href="#">ACSSU017</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<p><b>English</b></p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (<a href="#">ACELT1596</a>)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cross curriculum priorities</b></p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</p>	
<p><b>General Capabilities</b></p> <p>Intercultural understanding</p>	

