



Teacher Notes

Silly Birds

written by Gregg Dreise

illustrated by Gregg Dreise

Teacher Notes prepared by Nola Turner-Jensen

OVERVIEW

In this humble, charming and humorous morality tale, Maliyan is a proud eagle who always looks, listens and sees things from a long way away. One day he meets the turkey Wagun, who is a silly bird, and together these two new friends begin to do silly-bird things. The Elders and Maliyan's parents become very disappointed and soon the local billabong becomes a mess. The silly birds do not care for anyone and have eaten all the food.

Maliyan begins to see the error of his ways and tries to talk to Wagun and the other birds about their actions. No one listens. So Maliyan flies away and begins the journey of listening again. Maliyan soon becomes a proud leader and all the silly birds begin to follow his example. They all help clean up the messes they have made. All except one ... In this quintessential Australian fable, *Silly Birds* combines richly textured and striking illustrations of Australian animals with the gentle humour of an Aussie truism that it is hard to soar like an eagle when you are, in fact, surrounded by turkeys.

- Beautiful, strong illustrations
- An Aussie yarn mixed with Aboriginal imagery - fantastic last line
- Focus on Australian animals

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Gregg Dreise is a descendant of the Kamilaroi tribe, from south-west Queensland and north-west New South Wales. Gregg was born and raised in St George, Queensland and has seven older brothers and sisters. Gregg was lucky to have been raised in a family that loved

sport, music and poetry. Gregg's mother (Lyla Dreise-Knox) has always inspired him to write. Her poetry has entertained the family (as well as the odd magazine and newspaper readers) for many decades. Gregg is currently a teacher in Bundaberg, Queensland. The inspiration for this story came from Gregg's uncle, Reg Knox. He told a yarn about how he worked with some Italian farmers who trained a cockatoo to speak English and Italian. Reg Knox often said that if a small-brained bird could do that, then people, especially kids, could learn anything when they put in the effort.

THEMES

Aboriginal Culture:

- This is a modern reinterpretation of a traditional story that was previously handed down to children from their parents and elders to highlight behaviour and to teach the consequences of good and bad choices.
- The majority of the stories in contemporary Indigenous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures also contain a message or moral to the reader.

Friendship:

- The importance of choosing your friends wisely.
- The consequences of being involved with others who make the wrong choices.

Role of Elders:

- Aboriginal Elders play key roles in handing down cultural history and leading by example. Maliyan learns that when he listens to his Elders advice he can become a leader and make the right choices.

WRITING STYLE

Silly Birds is a narrative told in the third person written for lower primary school students. The narration examines feelings of sadness, love, selfishness and pride in a humorous way. It promotes the moral that breaking rules and selfish behaviour will have negative consequences.

The story supports Aboriginal storytelling practices: handing down cultural learning; teaching morals and acceptable behaviour; teaching specific characteristics of animas (e.g why the bush turkey cannot fly far).

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

These notes have been written in context with the Australian Curriculum. The appendix highlights a selection of relevant cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and content descriptors across a range of year levels that the following activities address.

CULTURAL NOTES

Please note that this is not a traditional creation story but a modern interpretation of one.

An effective way to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander information is to regionalise it within your curriculum. Educating your students about their own local history, bringing to life the Indigenous past of your region and using local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (wherever possible) within the school and classroom context is a wonderful way to start.

Further information can be found on the Crackerjack website

<http://www.crackerjackeducation.com.au/>

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Activities and Discussion Points:

- Discuss the location and setting of the story. Is it urban, remote outback, country, seaside or desert? Where is Kamilaroi country?
- What are some of the animals you might see in the outback?
- Come up with your own explanation of how the kangaroo got his tail or what happened to the tail of the koala in your own story.
- The author, Gregg Dreise, talks about the Kamilaroi Tribe. Discuss the notion of *tribe*. Show the class the Tribal map on <http://www.crackerjackeducation.com.au/resources/aboriginal-triballanguage-map/> Count the tribal groups in your area. Estimate how many tribal groups there are in Australia. Review the discussion of *tribe* and introduce the concept of a *tribe* or *tribal group* as a group of Aboriginal people who speak the same language, from the same land area, and have the same Dreaming songs and stories.
- In the story the author shows how not doing the right thing affects other people. How has Wagun and Maliyan's silly behaviour affected the other animals?

- Maliyan became a proud eagle again. What does feeling proud mean to you?
- Maliyan has the power to hear things from a long way away. Can you think of any other animals that possess this same ability? What other abilities do animals possess?
- Have you ever listened to stories from the old days from your elders such as grandparents? As a group discuss what some of the stories from the old days might be about.
- Aboriginal Elders are mature members of the language group and are responsible for sharing their knowledge and experience. They are also responsible for keeping traditions and stories alive to pass down to future generations. In today's urban societies you earn the right to be called an Elder through hard work and commitment for the good of your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Who is an elder in your family? Why are they elders?

Appendix – Links to the Australian Curriculum

Year Level	Subject & Strand	Content Descriptions
Year 2	<p>English – Literature Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1587</p>	<p>Literature and context (ACELT1587) <i>(Discussing moral and teaching stories from varied cultures, identifying and comparing their central messages)</i></p>
Year 2	<p>English – Literature Identify aspects of different types of literary texts that entertain, and give reasons for personal preferences URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1590</p>	<p>Responding to literature (ACELT1590) <i>(Describing features of texts from different cultures including recurring language patterns, style of illustrations, elements of humour or drama, and identifying the features which give rise to their personal preferences)</i></p>
		Interpreting, analysing,

<p>Year 2</p>	<p>English – Literacy Discuss different texts on a similar topic, identifying similarities and differences between the texts</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELY1665</p>	<p>evaluating (ACELY1665) <i>(Identifying examples and features of different kinds of spoken, non-verbal, written and visual communication from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and from several Asian cultures within Australia)</i></p>
<p>Year 2</p>	<p>English – Literature Discuss the characters and settings of different texts and explore how language is used to present these features in different ways</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1591</p>	<p>Examining literature (ACELT1591) <i>(Identifying features of imaginary or fantasy texts, for example magic powers, shifts in time)</i></p>
<p>Year 3</p>	<p>English – Language Understand that languages have different written and visual communication systems, different oral traditions and different ways of constructing meaning</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELA1475</p>	<p>Language variation and change (ACELA1475) <i>(Learning that a word or sign can carry different weight in different cultural contexts, for example that particular respect is due to some people and creatures and that stories can be passed on to teach us how to live appropriately)</i></p>
<p>Year 3</p>	<p>English – Literature Discuss texts in which characters, events and settings are portrayed in different ways and speculate on the authors' reasons</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1594</p>	<p>Literature and context (ACELT1594) <i>(Reading texts in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children/ young people are the central characters/protagonists and making links to students' own lives, noting similarities)</i></p>
<p>Year 3</p>	<p>English – Literature</p>	<p>Responding to literature (ACELT1596) <i>(Drawing on literature from</i></p>

	<p>Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1596</p>	<p><i>Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Asian cultures, to explore commonalities of experience and ideas as well as recognising difference in lifestyle and world view</i></p>
<p>Year 3</p>	<p>English – Literacy</p> <p>Read an increasing range of different types of texts by combining contextual, semantic, grammatical and phonic knowledge, using text processing strategies, for example monitoring, predicting, confirming, rereading, reading on and self-correcting</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELY1679</p>	<p>Interpreting, analysing, evaluating (ACELY1679) <i>(Reading text types from a student’s culture to enhance confidence in building reading strategies)</i></p>
<p>Year 4</p>	<p>English – Literature</p> <p>Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELT1602</p>	<p>Literature and context (ACELT1602) <i>(Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships)</i></p>
<p>Year 4</p>	<p>English – Language</p> <p>Understand that Standard Australian English is one of many social dialects used in Australia, and that while it originated in England it has been influenced by many other languages</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELA1487</p>	<p>Language variation and change (ACELA1487) <i>(Identifying words used in Standard Australian English that are derived from other languages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, and determining if the original meaning is reflected in English usage, for example kangaroo, tsunami, typhoon, amok, orang-utan)</i></p>

<p>Year 4</p>	<p>English – Language</p> <p>Understand that social interactions influence the way people engage with ideas and respond to others for example when exploring and clarifying the ideas of others, summarising their own views and reporting them to a larger group</p> <p>URL http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACELA1488</p>	<p>Language for interaction (ACELA1488)</p> <p><i>(Understanding how age, status, expertise and familiarity influence the ways in which we interact with people and how these codes and conventions vary across cultures)</i></p>
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