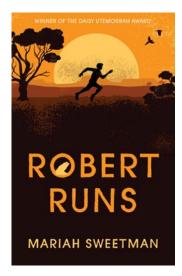
Magabala Books Teacher Notes

Prepared by Casey Mulder





Robert Runs

written by Mariah Sweetman

OVERVIEW

Essential reading for early teens and young adults. Based on true events, this gripping thriller sheds light on the brutalities of the past whilst championing the heroes who survived.

Robert Runs is a fast-paced thriller based on the author's great-great grandfather, Robert 'Goupong' Anderson, who was once the fastest man in Australia and world-record holder. Goupong, his little sister Dot, and his best friend Jonathan belong to the Ugarapul people of Queensland, the Green Tree Frog tribe, and live with their families and others within the harsh confines of the Deebing Creek Mission – a place run by the malevolent Boss Man. Goupong and Jonathan are focused on winning the mission's biggest running race that year, but when mysterious noises, unexplained occurrences and biblical events begin to plague the local area they are forced to investigate.

Robert Runs is a poignant look into the Deebing Creek Massacre and the tough reality of mission life. Weaving fact with fiction, this compelling story details the events leading up to that fateful day.

Will Goupong and Jonathan be strong enough to defeat the monster in the bush, or are the real monsters closer to home?

- Winner of the Daisy Utemorrah Award 2022
- · Gripping debut by a fresh new voice in the Australian literary scene
- · A highly engaging mystery that places First Nations history front and centre.
- Strong social and cultural content
- Powerful truth-telling about historical events
- Sharing the story of a community hero with the nation

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Mariah Sweetman is a proud descendant of the Ugarapul people. She is passionate about First Nations histories and engaging young people with stories. She loves to create with words and paint; often writing poetry and painting in her free time. She is a teacher by trade with a Bachelor in Education and Arts, Master of Education, specialising in Indigenous Education.

THEMES

- Aboriginal Peoples
 - Social Life and Customs
- Aboriginal Peoples
 - Histories and Culture
- Colonisation
- Conflict
- Country

- Massacres
- Identity
- Power & Authority
- Racism
- Relationships
- Strength & Courage



AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Robert Runs is an evocative and devastating retelling of the events leading up to the Deebing Creek Massacre. The story focuses on Robert Goupong Anderson's experience of being taken to the boys' home at Deebing Creek Mission. The impact of first contact and the subsequent effects of colonisation on the Ugarapul people is told alongside Goupong's experiences. Mariah Sweetman has constructed a powerful piece of truth-telling about a people displaced and dispossessed, and a young man grappling with his identity, school, friendships, culture, connection to Country, spirituality, and hope. Robert Runs is best suited to Young Adult and Adult audiences.

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 Years 8 - 10 English **HASS** Years 8 - 10

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

CULTURAL NOTES

Robert Runs addresses the massacres of Aboriginal people and the Stolen Generations. Please be mindful of Aboriginal students in your classroom and the impact of these topics on them. Invite an Aboriginal staff member or community members to join your class as additional support for these students. Advise the class where they can access help and assistance in your school while they study this text.

For information about teaching Australian Indigenous content see Teaching Indigenous content with Magabala Books.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

English

- Consider the structure of the novel. The prologue and epilogue focus on the same event. Throughout the novel, Robert Goupong Anderson's story is told, alongside the broader story of the Ugarapul people, and that of Aboriginal people across Australia. In pairs, students should select either story thread and map the timeline of events. Students should then compare their timeline with that of another group. Finally, a class timeline should be constructed using this activity that students can refer back to throughout their studies of the novel.
- Consider how personification, simile and metaphor have been used throughout the novel. Gather some additional examples into a table:

Simile: '...the stories had fallen heavy in his heart, like a boulder sinking to the bottom of the river...' p. 20

Metaphor: 'You're in a race that wasn't designed for our people to win.' p. 76

Personification: 'The thirsty grass twitched as it drank.' p. 84

Which characters are introduced in Chapter 1 & 2, and what do we learn about each of them? Consider the following aspects of characterisation: physical appearance, actions, inner thoughts, the reactions of other characters and speech.

- What is explained about the cultural practice of initiation in Chapter 3?
- What is the significance of Jonathan being 'named' in Chapter 3 (p. 36)?
- Consider the positioning of this flashback to first contact and invasion in Chapter 4. What does this device serve to achieve throughout the narrative as a whole?
- Starting in Chapter 4, create a mind map that explores what the reader learns about the Mundagutta throughout the novel.
- Why is Robert expected to look after Dot (Chapter 5)? What is the significance of their relationship, and why has it taken on new meaning in the context of the Mission?
- At the end of Chapter 5, the boys talk about the importance of caring for Country. What does Robert mean by saying, 'And it is our sacred duty to free ourselves so that we can do our job!' (p. 48).
- Using the imagery in Chapter 6, draw or collage two images that juxtapose Ugarapul Country before and after colonisation.
- With reference to the Prologue, Chapter 7, 10, 15 & the Epilogue, consider how the race and running operate symbolically throughout the novel.



CLASSROOM IDEAS CONT.

English cont.

- Who is Multuggerah and what do we learn about him in Chapter 10?
- Consider the notion of worldview, with reference to Chapter 6 & Chapter 13. What are the conflicting worldviews central to this novel?
- In Chapter 12 & 13, we learn about Miss Adams and Mr McRae's lives prior to the Mission and their reasons for being there. Using evidence from the text, compare and contrast these two characters.
- Consider the discussion about the colour of one's skin and access to stories heritage and culture in Chapter 14 (pp. 124-125). What are the varying viewpoints of the boys? How might this be linked to government policy and their lives on the Mission?
- Review the events of Chapter 15, recording Robert's actions, thoughts and the reactions of other characters to Robert.
- What is the significance of Jonathan congratulating Robert at the end of Chapter 15? How is this linked to the relationship between these two characters?
- What happens to Jesse, Jonathan, and Dot in Chapter 17? Why does Goupong call Jonathan 'the new Multuggerah'?
- Why do the boys think Boss Man might be the Mundagutta in Chapter 18 (p. 167)
- Map the events of Chapter 18 & 19, from the boys devising a plan to kill the sheep, to the massacre at the hands of Boss Man.
- In Chapter 17 & 18, why do the travellers and the young man choose to make their way to Deebing Creek Mission?
- Reflecting on the novel, consider Goupong's sense of identity. Who is he? What are the key experiences that have shaped him? What is important to him? What does he believe?
- In pairs, have students read aloud the poem at the end of the epilogue (p. 186). Now have students annotate the poem, connecting the ideas within it, back to the novel.

History

Government Policy

Conduct an historical inquiry into the Federal and State laws impacting Aboriginal people from invasion through to the 1967 Referendum. Note these down, with the specific impact on Aboriginal people explained clearly in your notes. Alternatively, allocate one law to each small group of students to investigate. Small groups then present their findings to the class.

The Stolen Generations

Conduct an historical inquiry into the Stolen Generations using the following guiding questions:

- Who are the Stolen Generations?
- Why were these children taken from their families?
- What was the government policy used to justify this?
- Why was the Apology made by Kevin Rudd (then Prime Minister of Australia) on February 13, 2008, significant?
- What are some of the ongoing impacts of the Stolen Generations on these people and their families?

Missions

Conduct an historical inquiry into Missions in Australia using the following guiding questions:

- What was a 'Mission' in this era of history?
- What reasoning (including government policy) was used to establish these Missions?
- What is the connection between the Mission system and the Stolen Generation?
- Why were some families (as in Robert Runs) moved onto Missions as a family and allowed to stay together?
- Why were these same families not permitted to stay on their own Country?
- Find and describe two other Missions in other states of Australia.

General Discussion - Making links between this information and Robert Runs

- 1. In Chapter 1, Goupong learns about the Mission. How does his father describe this to him? What is the impact of this on connection to Country?
- 2. In Chapter 2, Jonathan reflects on life before the Mission. What does he remember?
- 3. In Chapter 3, Jonathan shares his experience of being taken from his family. Reread this and reflect on this portion of the text, drawing links between this characters' experience and your research.
- 4. Chapter 8 addresses the concept of living by different laws. Explore this idea, and its impact on Aboriginal people.
- 5. In Chapter 13 McRae discusses his motivation for joining the Mission, and his concerns with the reality of the Mission. Reread this portion of the text and discuss.
- 6. In Chapter 17 the travellers choose to surrender and make their way to Deebing Creek Mission. With the historical understanding you have gained through your research, why do you think they made this decision?
- 7. In Chapter 18, the young warrior makes the same decision. Is he motivation the same or different, and why?



APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year

7 **English**

Literature

Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ACELT1619

Reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, settings and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view ACELT1620

Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches ACELT1622

Humanities and Social Sciences

History

The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ACDSEH148

Identify a range of questions about the past to inform a historical inquiry ACHHS207

R Literature

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

Share, reflect on, clarify and evaluate opinions and arguments about aspects of literary texts ACELT1627 Recognise and explain differing viewpoints about the world, cultures, individual people and concerns represented in texts ACELT1807

History

Identify a range of questions about the past to inform a historical inquiry ACHHS150v

9 Literature

Interpret and compare how representations of people and culture in literary texts are drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts ACELT1633

Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts ACELT1635

Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author's literary style ACELT1636

History

The short and long-term impacts of the movement of peoples during this period ACDSEH085

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

Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry ACHHS166

10 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 ACELT164

History

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

Identify and select different kinds of questions about the past to inform historical inquiry ACHHS184

Cross curriculum priorities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

General Capabilities

Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Personal and social capability, Ethical understanding, Intercultural understanding

