

Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon

Written and illustrated by Brenton E McKenna

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

It is the late 1940s and Broome, a small pearling town in the heart of an ancient land, is still recovering from WWII. Ubby, a smart, street-wise Aboriginal girl, is the leader of a small rag-tag gang known as the 'Underdogs'. Trying to make a name for the Underdogs, she meets Sai Fong, a Chinese girl just off the boat from Shanghai. From the moment Ubby and Sai Fong meet, their worlds collide as they find themselves thrown into a series of bizarre adventures full of myths and legends and everything from ancient mechanical demons to fantastic beasts — and secrets never before exposed.

This is an epic tale that measures the limits of courage and friendship. *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon* is storytelling on a grand scale that pulls its central characters from the unique multicultural town of Broome. It expertly draws in characters that have links to other worlds amidst a complex backdrop of Aboriginal and Chinese mythology.

- Unique — brilliantly executed first Indigenous Australian graphic novel
- General appeal as well as diehard Manga fans — graphic fight sequences
- Major debut by Indigenous artist and storyteller

THEMES

- Indigenous Culture
- Chinese mythology
- Broome
- Dragons
- Courage
- Friendship

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

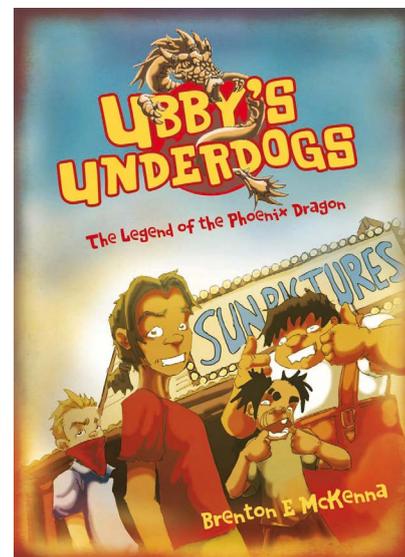
Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon is the first in Brenton E McKenna's graphic novel trilogy. It interweaves Aboriginal and Chinese mythology to create an adventurous story filled with local-Broome culture. Ubby and her gang, the Underdogs, use team work and resilience to help solve problems and help their new friend, Sai Fong. The series will appeal to an upper-primary to lower-secondary audience. It integrates humour, with fast-paced action and would attract reluctant readers.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum:

| Learning area | Year level |
|---------------|---------------|
| English | Years 5, 7, 9 |

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

Brenton 'Ez' McKenna is a Yawuru artist and graphic novelist from Broome, WA who fell in love with comic books at a young age. He draws his inspiration from growing up in Broome and the Aboriginal and Asian influences in his own life. Brenton studied visual arts for two years at Goulburn TAFE and in 2009 was one of twenty successful applicants to be awarded a highly sought after mentorship with the Australian Society of Authors. Brenton's success and recognition as a graphic novelist has taken him across the world – in 2015 he participated in the Edinburgh International Book Festival and travelled to India with the First Nations Australian Writers Network for the Literary Commons! project.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Discuss the generic structure of graphic novels, including the layout, speech/thought bubbles and narration boxes. Read the first few pages together as a class.
- Take time to read about the various characters in *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon*. Refer back to this page as required as you read the text.
- After reading the prologue, contextualise the main story components before continuing.
- Take time to become familiar with the map of Broome given in the opening pages. Locate Broome on a map of Australia. Visit websites about Broome to become more familiar with this town: <http://www.visitbroome.com.au/>
- The text is set shortly after World War II, in a town that is a cultural melting pot of many different nationalities. If this story was set in the modern day, how might the tension be different? How important is the historical setting to the storyline?
- Discuss the aspects of visual literacy involved when reading graphic novels. How is meaning conveyed through the use of:
 - Angle (low, mid, high)
 - Framing
 - Gaze (close-up, mid-shot, long shot)
 - Colour
 - Facial expressions/non-verbal gestures
- What is an underdog? Why is Ubby's gang called the Underdogs?
- The dedication gives clues as to the inspiration behind the trilogy – the author's grandmother, Alberta – or Ubby. If you were to use your grandmother's life experiences to inspire a story, what shape would your story take?
- What is the role of the Secret Council of Magic? How could something like this be useful in the real world?
- Broome is described as a 'cocktail of nationalities from ancient lands and exotic cultures', however sometimes this mixture becomes dangerous. Why is this the case? How can this be managed?
- Ubby is 'on the brink of being a hero'. What traits does she exhibit that makes her worthy of this title?
- Ubby's gang has many qualities that help them survive. What are these qualities? How do these help such a small and underestimated group to succeed in challenges?
- Create profiles of the members of Ubby's Underdogs – Ubby, Fin, Sel and Gabe, showing their unique characteristics and superpowers.
- Create a story map that traces the plot of *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon*.
- Why do Ubby's Underdogs spit whenever they mention the British? What is the historical significance of the British to various gang members?
- What examples of racism are evident in *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon*?
- How is Sai Fong's sickness connected to the Phoenix Dragon's illness in the prologue?
- How has the author interwoven indigenous and Chinese mythology to create this tale?
- How can we tell that Sai Fong is communicating with Medinga?
- Discuss the old Chinese saying that 'To truly savour the taste of victory, one must know the bitterness of defeat'.
- What impact has the death of Ubby's father had on her? Justify your response with evidence from the text.



- What different perspectives do readers receive in *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon*? How does the author achieve this?
- Discuss the way in which graphic novels compress language and create layers of meaning through both the written text and illustrations.
- In what ways have symbolism, myths and allegory been used in *Ubby's Underdogs: The Legend of the Phoenix Dragon*?
- Why do the gangs play Gruff and other challenges in order to overcome rival tensions?
- What can we tell about Donappleton and the relationship he shared with his father? How has this impacted on Donappleton in his interactions with others?
- Why do Ubby and her gang instantly befriend Sai Fong? How does this make Sai Fong feel?
- Before reading the rules of Gruff and the Dolby Dance at the back of the book, establish your own set of rules for these two games using the sequences in the text.
- Ubby and her friends go the Sun Pictures in Broome. Find out more about this iconic cinema at the following link: <http://www.broomemovies.com.au/history.html>
- Read the transcript of ABC radio interview with the author Brenton E McKenna, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/audio/2013/11/01/3882392.htm>. You could also watch the following YouTube clip <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fvjJONSFCU>. Write a reflection that shows your understanding of the author's inspiration for creating *Ubby's Underdogs*.

APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

| Year | Curriculum Area |
|------|---|
| 5 | <p>English</p> <p><i>Literature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (ACELT1608) • Recognise that ideas in literary texts can be conveyed from different viewpoints, which can lead to different kinds of interpretations and responses (ACELT1610) • Create literary texts using realistic and fantasy settings and characters that draw on the worlds represented in texts students have experienced (ACELT1612) • Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors (ACELT1798) |
| 7 | <p>English</p> <p><i>Literature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts (ACELT1621) • Understand, interpret and discuss how language is compressed to produce a dramatic effect in film or drama, and to create layers of meaning in poetry, for example haiku, tankas, couplets, free verse and verse novels (ACELT1623) |
| 9 | <p>English</p> <p><i>Literature</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes (ACELT1637) |

