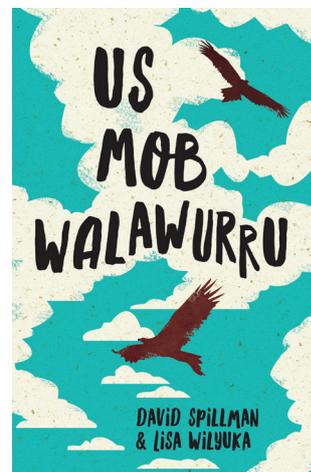


Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

Us Mob Walawurru

Written by David Spillman and Lisa Wilyuka

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler



OVERVIEW

Funny, straight-talking Ruby lives on a cattle station and goes to the silver bullet school. When she questions Mr Duncan, her well-meaning teacher, on why their cultures are so at odds with each other, she unintentionally triggers her own awakening. The more Ruby learns, the harder the journey becomes as she is drawn back to country to uncover the secrets of her past.

Us Mob Walawurru follows the life of Ruby, a young Luritja girl growing up in Central Australia in the 1960s. Living on a cattle station, Ruby is faced with many situations and dilemmas resulting from cultural difference – education, language, family obligation, relationship to country and environment, and ideas of ownership. A work of historical fiction and inter-cultural exploration, some of the events in *Us Mob Walawurru* are based on stories told by the Luritja people of Titjikala in Central Australia. Some historical events are also included.

- Highly original, captivating and funny story
- Quintessential Australian desert story
- Extraordinary read
- Timeless resource with important information about the social history of remote community living

THEMES

- Aboriginal Peoples - Social Life and Customs
- Aboriginal Peoples - Histories and Culture
- Courage
- Respect
- Trust
- Wisdom
- Identity
- Reconciliation
- First Contact
- Intercultural Understanding

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Set in Central Australia during the 1960s, *Us Mob Walawurru* is a beautifully nuanced story that shares the coming of age of Ruby, a young Luritja girl who is connecting with her identity and questioning the differences between Aboriginal and European beliefs. Through Ruby's experiences, readers are immersed in the tremendously spiritual and rich culture of the Walawurru people. Ruby's perspective makes *Us Mob Walawurru* a truly absorbing text that helps readers to better understand aspects of Aboriginal culture such as the importance of ancestors, law, language, the Dreaming, respect and identity. It also addresses some of the atrocities faced by Aboriginal people following white settlement, including displacement and massacres, but does so in an age-appropriate manner and as sensitively as possible. Because of such subject matter, it is best suited to a young adult audience, although a great deal of the text could certainly be used with upper primary students as well.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lisa Wilyuka is a Luritja woman from Titjikala, a small community about 120km south of Alice Springs. She has lived in Titjikala all her life and works closely with youth in the community. She is especially passionate about young people being involved in sport and cultural activities. Lisa is an artist and is interested in exploring traditional dot painting techniques. Her work is sold throughout the Titjikala Art Centre and galleries in Central Australia.

David Spillman has spent several years working on Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. For some time he has been exploring Aboriginal cultures and their similarities and differences to his own Western socialisation. He is excited by the contribution of Indigenous perspectives in resolving some of the challenges we face in the world today. David lives in Queensland with his wife and three children. He works as a facilitator and writer.



LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

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

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Ruby and her home at Dry River Station in Central Australia. Her voice is instantly arresting, drawing the reader into the narrative with her frankness and honesty. Discuss the importance of such a voice in narrative. How have the authors successfully achieved this objective?
- Discuss the language choices used to establish the desert setting such as 'Aunty Alice's cry shattered the desert silence' and 'A chorus of camp dogs broke into wild response – the blackfella's alarm clock' (p1). How does this description immediately grab the reader's attention?
- What role does Mr Duncan play in the novel? Why does he refer to the camp dogs as 'guardians of the familiar' (p3)? What does he mean by this? How is this motif woven throughout *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- Why is the school referred to as the silver bullet, even though the students learn outside?
- Why does Aunty Alice's voice trail away when she recalls how angry the parents became when Mr Duncan arrived with his silver bullet? What were the parents afraid would happen? How do we know this?
- What role does Tjilpi play in *Us Mob Walawurru*? How does he help both Ruby and the reader to learn more about Aboriginal culture?
- Reread p7 and 8 in which the creation of Walawurru country is explained. Discuss the role that the Dreaming, the ancestors and the songline had in this creation.
- *Us Mob Walawurru* goes to great lengths to emphasise the central place of country to indigenous culture. As you read the text, keep note of the many ways in which the authors show this, for example, when Tjilpi takes country with him on the bus trip, and when Ruby rubs country all over the bus before they leave. Write an explanation to share the interconnectedness of Aboriginal people to country, identity and culture.
- As Ruby discovers more about whitefella ways, she questions concepts such as ownership. How are blackfella and whitefella views on ownership different? How is the theme of ownership explored throughout *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- How do the Luritja people show respect for country? Give examples from the text to help with your response.
- In what ways are customs for men and women different amongst the Walawurru people? Why does Ruby try not to listen to men's business? What does it mean for men to be initiated and to have 'gone through Law' (p16)?
- Explain the relationship that Uncle Archie has with Old Joe Mogren. Why have the authors included this close bond between an Aboriginal man and a white landowner? What comment are they making about the role of respect and reconciliation between black and white people in Australia?
- Why does Ruby have to keep reminding herself to be brave with new things? In what ways is *Us Mob Walawurru* a book about courage?
- How are Aboriginal family structures similar to and different from white family structures? How is the power and importance of the extended family shown in *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- In what ways does Ruby find Mr Duncan odd? Why does she ultimately come to respect and accept him? How do his actions help this to occur? What does this say about the place of mutual respect and understanding in the reconciliation process?
- Give examples of Mr Duncan's growing respect for the Luritja people. How does he come to better understand and appreciate their culture? How would you describe his burgeoning sense of understanding about Aboriginal culture? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Why does the community wish to travel to Tulu together? How does the journey from Dry River Station to Tulu reveal to both Mr Duncan and readers the strength and tradition of Walawurru culture? What have you learnt from this journey?
- Ruby says she doesn't understand why Mr Duncan asks the children questions he already knows they know (p22). Why does he do this?
- What does Ruby notice is missing on Mr Duncan's map (p29)? Why is his map missing such things?
- How does Aunty Alice respectfully teach Mr Duncan how to better connect with the children, for example, when he asks them the direction to Alice Springs?



- Reread the passage on p36 in which we learn about country through the actions of Tjilpi. How does the character of Aunty Alice act as a conduit between Tjilpi and the reader?
- Why does Ruby get angry when she learns more about how her people lived before the white people came? What questions does this new knowledge prompt?
- Ruby says, 'It's better to be brave and know it...rather than hide away...because of fear' (p40). Reflect on a time in your life when discovering the truth was challenging but necessary.
- How does the text include the impact on Aborigines of first contact with white people? Why do the authors go to such lengths to show readers the positive power of intercultural respect?
- After learning about the experiences of the Walamurru mob after coming across the 'monsters', why does Aunty say to Ruby 'Don't forget it but don't speak of it again' (p44)?
- Why does Ruby's anger about the mistreatment of Aboriginal people by whitefellas lessen when she thinks about Old Joe and Mr Duncan? Why have the authors included these respectful relationships?
- Why does Aunty Alice worry that the young men will take the 'whitefella's law if it's easy' rather than 'do our law the right way' (p50)?
- Why, after the Blitzten rolled over, did the young men stand there 'like lonely weeping desert oaks, heads hanging low' (p55)? In what ways do their ancestors teach the Luritja people lessons about their law?
- How is Alice Springs different from Dry River Station? Show this comparison on a graphic organiser.
- How does the visit to Alice Springs and Tulu help Ruby realise the true meaning of country, especially to those who have left it? How does seeing family and feeling country again help those who are ailing?
- After meeting her family in Tulu, Ruby says that she's 'overcome with feelings' (p67). Why does Ruby feel as though she's known these people all her life when she's only just met them?
- Why does Ruby feel the wind in her feathers when she runs on Sports Day? Why does she slow down to let her sister Maisy tie with her for first place?
- How does the death of Titus affect the Luritja people? How is his death acknowledged?
- Why is the book separated into Parts 1 and 2? How are these two sections different?
- What does Uncle Archie teach Ruby about country?
- Why does Uncle Archie give Daniel the new Landrover? What are the consequences of this action? Discuss whether or not you agree with these? Do you think that Uncle would have regretted his decision or not? Discuss.
- Ruby is initially upset at having to leave Dry River Station, but later says that 'the knot of fear in my belly started to disappear and was replaced by a growing warmth' (p99). What enabled this to occur?
- In what ways does Aunty Alice support Uncle Archie?
- Using the description of Big Sky Station in Part 2, sketch or paint Ruby's new surroundings.
- How have the authors used Hughie's character to help non-indigenous readers better understand Aboriginal spirituality? Why does Hughie go to such lengths to explain his view on spirituality to Uncle Archie?
- In what ways does Ruby feel connected to Blue Sky Station? How is this connection enabled?
- When Neena comes into Ruby's life, it allows Ruby to grow yet again. In what ways does Neena become Ruby's new teacher?
- How are Ruby and Neena similar? Why are they able to make such a connection?
- With older students, use Neena's story starting on p117 to investigate the displacement and destruction of the Aboriginal people at the hands of white settlers.
- When Neena gives Ruby a writing book of her very own, she says 'My dearest Ruby, your language and culture tell you who you are' (p123). In the role of Ruby, write in this book, exploring these sentiments.
- Neena and Ruby use a botany book to make observations about birds and marsupials. Choose one of the animals that they study and make your own sketches and notes about this species.
- How does the passage about the Luritja wiltja and the whitefella cubby house show the differences and similarities between these two cultures? In what ways is this used to show the potential of reconciliation?
- Why does Ruby object to mining? How does the cubby house help to show this type of invasion?



- Why does Neena encourage Ruby to write in English and Luritja? In what ways is Neena empowering both Ruby and her people?
- Discuss Neena's advice to Ruby: 'When there's something really important to do, most times you will see two paths. One path seems easy and the other more difficult. Lots of people take the easy path...Short-cuts never work. They are always dead ends. Always take the harder path, Ruby. You will need strength and wisdom for it but it's the right way, the way to grow. Easy way's no good' (p128).
- Why does Ruby feel inclined to laugh at the Referendum declaring Aboriginal people as Australian citizens and therefore 'coming from this country' (p138)? How would the 1967 Referendum have changed Ruby's life? How would it have remained the same?
- When Ruby is a wife and mother, Gough Whitlam becomes Prime Minister, introducing the Central Land Council. By 1988, Native Title was established. Conduct further research into these developments in policy. How does Ruby feel about these notions of land ownership?
- Ruby learns from many different people in her life, in particular Aunty Alice, Uncle Archie and later, Neena. How do they help to shape her as a person and as a Luritja woman? What lessons have you learnt from your extended family or mentors? Share with a friend.
- Create a character profile of Aunty Alice, Uncle Archie or Old Joe. As you read the text, add to these profiles. Choose one of these characters and write a chapter from their perspective.
- Discuss the role of respect in Ruby's upbringing. How does she show this respect?
- Using evidence from the text, write a journal entry about growing up during the 1960s.
- How does Neena encourage Ruby to take an active role in standing up for her people?
- How does the inclusion of the Luritja language embellish the reader's understanding of the importance of language to Aboriginal culture? Why does the use of such language increase as the text progresses? How does this reflect Ruby's coming of age and the audience's appreciation of the Luritja culture?
- In a paragraph, explain the place that Walawurru – the wedge-tailed eagle – plays in the culture of the Luritja people.



APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
6	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)
7	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and explore ideas and viewpoints about events, issues and characters represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1619) • Discuss aspects of texts, for example their aesthetic and social value, using relevant and appropriate metalanguage (ACELT1803) • Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches (ACELT1622) <p>History</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACDSEH148)
8	<p>English</p> <p>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)
9	<p>English</p> <p>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) • Reflect on, discuss and explore notions of literary value and how and why such notions vary according to context (ACELT1634) • Analyse texts from familiar and unfamiliar contexts, and discuss and evaluate their content and the appeal of an individual author's literary style (ACELT1636)
10	<p>English</p> <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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) <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>Cross-Curriculum Priorities</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture</p>	

