

Dreaming Stories: A springboard for learning

Jenni Connor

Includes:
'The Dreaming' DVD



Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people are warned that this book may contain images of deceased persons.

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Research in Practice Series

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About SNAICC and the SNAICC Resource Service

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, SNAICC, formally established in 1981, is the national non-government peak body in Australia representing the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

In 2005 SNAICC received funding through the Australian Government's Early Childhood - Invest to Grow Initiative of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to establish a national Indigenous family and children's resource service, which was officially named the SNAICC Resource Service (SRS) in 2006.

The SRS works across the family and children's services sector with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based services and other services working directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to produce and distribute resources and information in four priority areas.

The *Dreaming Stories: A springboard for learning* RIPS publication fits under SRS Priority Area One: Early childhood development, parenting and child rearing.

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About the author

Jenni Connor has worked as a teacher, principal, superintendent and curriculum manager. She has developed national and state documents on learning, curriculum and assessment, and managed Equity Programs for schools, including Indigenous education. She has worked at all levels of education, and is highly regarded for her expertise in relation to young children and their learning.

Jenni is currently teaching units for a new course in early education and care at the University of Tasmania. She has written a number of publications, including co-authoring Early Childhood Australia's *Your child's first year at school: A book for parents*.



Introduction

'Dreaming stories tell the origins of the environment, how the Spirit Ancestors formed and gave life to the land and laid down the Law: structures of society, rituals to maintain the life of the land, rules for living. Above all, Dreaming stories are the stories of the land, living with the land and belonging to the land' (SNAICC, 2005, p.1).

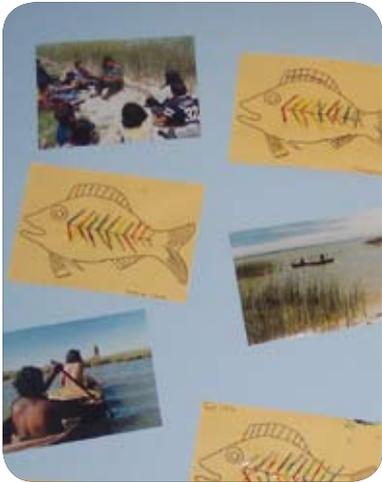


'Mainstream educators want to be certain that materials relating to Indigenous cultures and beliefs are authentic, and they want advice on how to use them appropriately.'

Dreaming Stories were originally created by Indigenous communities, for Indigenous people. They play an important part in the cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because Indigenous values, responsibilities and spiritual beliefs are woven into the Stories. Since the Stories hold great wisdom for us all, children from a range of cultural backgrounds can gain valuable understandings from them.

Mainstream educators want to be certain that materials relating to Indigenous cultures and beliefs are authentic, and they want advice on how to use them appropriately. That is why *The Dreaming* series produced by Aboriginal Nations (www.ablnat.com.au) is such a valuable resource.

As Keith Salvat, the series Producer, said: *'As an education resource, The Dreaming series is regarded as the most credible and informative product available to Australian schools and educational institutions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait culture[s] ...'*



Aboriginal Nations produced 78 episodes of *The Dreaming*, an animation series based on Indigenous storytelling. The stories are sourced from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in consultation with their Elders, and with permission for them to be re-told and animated.

A kit containing the stories on DVD and a teachers' guide was distributed through the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) in 2005.

Sharing Indigenous stories with children prior to school age

In 2006, SNAICC and Early Childhood Australia (ECA) wondered if some of the stories might be suited to younger children in childcare and preschool settings, so they initiated this research project. They thought the animation style of the production would appeal to young children, providing an introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and beliefs, and a springboard for discussion about significant values and ideas.

As Josie Boyle, the narrator of two stories in this collection, tells us:

'When I go to schools and show these stories, both the black kids and the white kids respond in a very positive way; even those children who do not normally participate in class discussions do get involved and want to talk about the stories.'

'When I visit preschools it helps to bond the children who are from different ethnic backgrounds, because they all have a common response to the stories. They laugh and see the fun and humour in many of the stories.'

'For the black kids this is important because it helps the other children in the group understand their culture at a very early age. For the white kids it helps them understand the adventurous nature and the important things in Aboriginal culture. Generally there is a sense of pride that comes from the children that these stories are about them and about their country.'

SNAICC and ECA were interested in how educators in Indigenous and other settings might use the stories for children's learning. The result is this book, which focuses on young children, prior to school age. It complements the teachers' guide SNAICC has distributed for Year One upwards and offers ideas for practitioners working in the pre-school sector.

Centres involved

The centres that agreed to participate in the project were an open childcare centre in Darwin, a preschool with a culturally mixed population in South Australia, a Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS) near Adelaide, two MACS in rural Victoria and an Aboriginal Child Care centre in northern Tasmania. Fourteen stories were chosen to trial in the six centres.

Selected stories were copied onto DVD and sent to each location with a request that staff:

- ➔ view them
- ➔ show them to children
- ➔ note children's responses
- ➔ document the activities they thought appropriate for the age groups, following the viewing
- ➔ provide 'words of caution' about the suitability of particular stories for different age groups.

Practitioners were invited to show the DVD to any of the children in the centre, but particularly to engage children in the three–five age group in making meaning from the stories and responding to them. This book records early childhood educators' responses.

Information arising from the research is organised around:

- ➔ brief synopses and interpretations of each story, derived from the original story narrators and other research by this writer
- ➔ key messages identified by centre staff and this writer
- ➔ comments from staff in early childhood settings
- ➔ activities arising from the story, documented by staff.

Some stories were trialled in more than one centre. The centres are not identified in connection with specific activities or comments.

'When I go to schools and show these stories, both the black kids and the white kids respond in a very positive way; even those children who do not normally participate in class discussions do get involved and want to talk about the stories.'

Understanding The Dreaming



It is important for educators to understand that Dreaming Stories are not fairytales; they are not fictions made up to entertain children. One original purpose for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional stories was to lay down rules for living. Dreaming Stories also carry knowledge from one generation to another, about the world, the Law, society, and the life and death of people.

They are serious pieces of communication, with a serious purpose. Accordingly, educators have a responsibility to treat the stories with the same respect that they receive in Indigenous communities.

Because they are complex vehicles for conveying important messages, the stories can be interpreted at a number of levels (Sveiby & Skunthorpe, 2006).

Level one

A Story may relate to questions children might ask, such as *'Why is some water salty?'* It explains differences we see in the natural world and our responsibility to care for it.

'It is important for educators to understand that Dreaming Stories are not fairytales; they are not fictions made up to entertain children.'

Level two

A Story may give lessons about people living within a community; about sharing and the responsibilities of individuals, leaders and communities; about right and wrong ways of acting and the shame that follows from breaking the Law.

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Level four

Not all Stories have a fourth level. When present, it relates to practices and ceremonies that can be accessed only by those who are initiated through training and long experience, and given the right and responsibility to carry the Story and its meanings for the benefit of the community.

Level three

A Story may explain the relationship between a community and the larger environment: the earth and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It may speak about the careful maintenance of resources to ensure the survival of plants, animals and people—or it may give advice about how to deal with disputes between members of different communities.



Choosing the stories



Educators reported that children under the age of three did not fully engage with the stories they were shown, although they appeared to enjoy the animation style of the films.

Children in the three–five age range were fascinated by many of the stories and talked enthusiastically about the ‘characters’, their actions and their consequences, often relating them to their own lives. Young children seemed most easily to understand stories featuring animals and familiar landscapes and behaviours.



Some educators commented that they were not comfortable showing young children material containing ‘violent’ actions. This is an individual, professional decision, and other educators said they felt they *could* explain why people acted in the way they did and why it’s important to think about the consequences of our actions.

Some educators wondered if the abstract ideas in some stories might be beyond young viewers. They had in mind stories that tell about how the landscape, sky and languages were made and those that include the Spirit world.

It is evident, however, from the reports reproduced in the fourth chapter that, with help from adults, children are able to make sense of many of the sophisticated ideas in these stories.

Three stories were not trialed for the reasons discussed above—consequently, they are not discussed in this book, but are on the DVD that accompanies it. As always, educators need to make decisions about the materials they use, taking into account the age of the children they work with, their knowledge of the children, and their own understanding and experience.

‘Young children seemed most easily to understand stories featuring animals and familiar landscapes and behaviours.’



Stories that appealed to young children

The discussion that follows focuses on the six stories that educators found relatively easy to introduce to children in the three–five age range.

Ngarntipi (Spinifex Pigeon) as told by Janet Nagamarra from the Warlpiri people (Tanami Desert, Central Australia)

Ngarntipi, the Spinifex Pigeon, became lonely travelling back to her own country. She searched for damper seeds for days and nights, eventually creating the Pindjirri seeds now used for damper. She tells the Warlpiri people they can gather the seeds; they make damper and the women perform the dance of the Spinifex Pigeon.

About the story

This story highlights the importance of seeds for food and new life. It explains how seeds are carried by birds from place to place and gives reasons for the markings on the Spinifex Pigeon (created by her tears). The story emphasises the importance of dance as part of rituals that communicate the way to live and the relationship between people, animals and the natural world.

Key ideas

- Food gathering.
- Women's and men's roles.
- Seasons.
- Ceremonies.



Comments

The children liked this story a lot. They listened to it while passing seeds through their hands. They loved the feeling of the seeds and seemed engrossed in the story.

Related activities

- Just like the Ngarntipi, we collected edible seeds. We broke the pods open and ate the seed inside.
- Children grew seeds and looked for other plants that propagate through seed dispersal. Children talked about and investigated the seasons. They talked about rain and how important it is for growing plants.
- Children re-told the story in their own words and talked about how things happened and how the pigeon felt at different stages in her journey.



Buduk and Bulaytj Bulaytj as told by Alfred Yangipuy Wanambi from the Marrangu Clan (Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory)

Buduk and his wife Bulaytj Bulaytj lived in Arnhem Land when there was fresh water everywhere, even in the dry season. Bulaytj Bulaytj was a good wife, taking care of Buduk and the camp. One day it was hot and she fell asleep. Buduk was so angry he secreted a liquid that turned the fresh water salty. Bulaytj Bulaytj punished him by turning him into a beetle that no-one will eat because it's too salty. She turned into a wallaby, a tasty animal that people will eat. She managed to create one pool of fresh water that is still used by the people today.

About the story

The story explains how fresh and salt water came to be in Arnhem Land and how the beetle and the wallaby were created. It reminds people which foods are good to eat and which are not, and how sharing the workload makes for more successful communities.

Key ideas

- Salt and fresh water.
- Roles of men and women.
- Work for mutual benefit.
- Creation of animals.

Comments

The children enjoyed the story. The messages of 'treat people fairly and with respect and don't get angry' were discussed. The teacher asked: 'Who were the people in the story? What kind of people were they? What did they do? What do you think of what they did?'

Related activities

- Staff drew attention to the music used in the film, and children found and used the rhythm sticks and percussion instruments in the room.
- Children were interested in the didgeridu, and the teacher asked an authorised community person to play for them and also to talk about living with the land, finding water, etc.

Tajeer-Tarnium as told by Joy Murphy from the Woiwurrung Clan of the Wurundjeri people (around the Yarra River in Victoria)

Tajeer-Tarnium is a mischievous orphan boy who hides the hunters' waterbags and is turned into a koala.

About the story

The story explains the Law and what can happen if you break it, because the Law is made to keep society operating safely and in harmony. The story is gently and formally told. The little boy is not judged harshly by the teller. Traditional names and words are well-explained. The film is visually very attractive.

Key ideas

- How the animal/totem Koala was made.
- There are rules for living.
- Don't cause harm to others.
- Water is essential for survival.

Comments

Young children enjoyed the story and animation. Some children were concerned about the punishment of the little boy. They talked about how other people should have befriended him because he was an orphan, and have realised that he played tricks only because he was bored and lonely. This was an important discussion of values. Many children in the centre are in foster/grandparent care, so the idea of 'family' was treated very sensitively.

The children were interested in the koala, an animal they know; they did not understand the symbolic meanings: 'if humans do wrong they become animals'.

'The story explains the Law and what can happen if you break it, because the Law is made to keep society operating safely and in harmony.'



Related activities

- Self and social development: talk about loneliness and including others. Talk about feelings and relationships: what happens if you do the wrong thing?
- Communication and language: identify key Aboriginal words, e.g. tarnucks (water vessels); list and discuss alongside English words. Read related stories (e.g. *Koala Lou*) and extension books about family and loneliness.
- Understanding the world: discuss responsibility for the environment, plant a garden and discuss the importance of water.
- Diversity: discuss different family types. Ask children to name people who are important to them on a 'family tree'. On a map, highlight where the story comes from: discuss other Aboriginal stories from other places.
- Arts and creativity: provide materials for children to weave, and fallen bark for them to include in collages. Make tarnucks and hang them from a gum tree.
- Design and technology: test the tarnucks for holding water and try to make one that carries water best.
- Health: encourage children to re-tell the story using climbing equipment. Walk to find a eucalypt, as in the story.

The Snake and the Goanna as told by Josie Boyle from the Wongi people (Western Desert cultures)

Goanna and the Snake were once friends, playing chasing games and looking for food to eat. Snake suggested they find ochre plants and paint themselves to be pretty like birds. Goanna did all the work because she had hands, crushing the ochres and painting Snake. She realised there was no paint left for her and she'd still be mainly brown. So they fought, and Snake bit Goanna so she had to go to the medicine tree. Today, snakes and goannas still fight if they meet.

About the story

The story explains the differences children see in snakes and goannas. It emphasises sharing roles and working with members of your family and community.

Key ideas

- Fairness and sharing work.
- Selfishness and losing friends.
- Bush medicine.
- Camouflage.

Comments

The animation works particularly well in this story. Children learned that the snake can be colourful because it has poison to defend itself; the goanna needs to be brown as camouflage against predators. The story led to deep discussion about cooperation, and also about deceit and what the outcomes of each form of behaviour might be. It introduced the idea of jealousy and how we can all be different but equal. Children learned that if a friendship 'goes wrong', a grudge can last for a long time.



'The story explains the differences children see in snakes and goannas. It emphasises sharing roles and working with members of your family and community.'

Related activities

- Self and social development: talk about friendship, bullying, difference, jealousy and fairness.
- Understanding the world: investigate the desert and its animals. Compare animals in one environment to those in another.
- Communication and language: make a chart using the words for snake and goanna in local Aboriginal language; use related Aboriginal stories and poems.
- Diversity: talk about how we are all different and 'beauty' doesn't make you better. Chart different species of snakes and goannas and their locations in Australia.
- Arts and creativity: put up examples of artwork created by Aboriginal people and discuss the different styles used. Ask children to make and paint a brown goanna, then put colour on a brown snake. Create a red desert backdrop and invite children to make and add animals they know.
- Health: talk about what to do if you see a snake. Play 'chasings' in pairs (one snake and one goanna). Investigate bush medicines.
- Design and technology: ask children to use computer programs to design their own reptiles.

The Butterfly as told by Olga Miller from the Butchulla people (Fraser Island, Queensland)

During the First Time, when the land had just been made, Caterpillar came upon a small spirit called Birrave, who painted the flowers, trees and grasses. Birrave looked tired, so Caterpillar helped him by carrying the paint pail. Willy Wagtail tried to trick Caterpillar, so he could eat him, but Spider gave Caterpillar beautiful wings so he could fly away.

About the story

The story explains the natural cycles of birth and death. It encourages children to be kind. It reminds us to attend to the spirits and the natural world.



Key ideas

- Help each other.
- Life cycles.
- Propagation of plants.



Related activities

- Self and social development: play games that involve cooperation and teamwork; discuss the messages about relationships and helping each other.
- Understanding the world: investigate different life cycles, explore the transformations involved for the butterfly; visit a museum to explore their butterfly collection, investigate spider webs and why they are made.
- Communication and language: identify and name, in local Aboriginal language, the colours in the story, teach songs involving colours using words from Aboriginal languages. Read *The very hungry caterpillar* and ask children to explain the sequence of both stories. Make a big book telling the sequence of *The Butterfly*.
- Diversity: locate the story and storyteller using the map of Indigenous Australia (see Horton, 1996).
- Arts and creativity: provide cellophane, paper and paints for children to create butterflies.
- Health: have children move to music as caterpillars, butterflies, birds and spiders. Share edible berries.
- Design and technology: using a computer, discover the use of ochre within Aboriginal communities.

Comments

This story was very popular and able to be enjoyed by children from three years old. It made them look more closely at the natural world, and the older ones investigated the life cycle of the butterfly.



'The story explains the natural cycles of birth and death. It encourages children to be kind. It reminds us to attend to the spirits and the natural world.'

How the desert came to be as told by Josie Boyle from the Wongi people (Western Desert cultures)

This story talks about the earth when dinosaurs and giant animals roamed the land. The animals call a meeting to discuss the problem of over-population and limited food supply, and decide to drain water from their waterholes to make new lands. Then they found that many plants would not grow in the salt water and animals were dying. However, some animals discovered that at certain times the desert blooms and you can gather berries and flowers. They discovered underground sources of fresh water.

About the story

This creation story is poetically told, with great attention to the language of the telling, especially descriptive words, adjectives and adverbs. It explains how the desert came to be and why only certain kinds of animals and birds can live there.

Key ideas

- Time and place.
- Changes over time.
- Adaptation.
- Responsibility for the environment.
- Indigenous knowledge of living with the land.

Comments

Children enjoyed the style of the film. They recognised and named many of the animals in the story. They liked the dinosaurs best because many are at an age when they are fascinated with dinosaurs. Later, they can learn about competition for food and space, adaptation and extinction, and why some plants and animals (and people) can survive in harsh environments.

Related activities:

- Teachers asked questions such as, 'What animals did you see? What do you know about dinosaurs? Why did they die?'
- Children experimented with growing plants in salt water and pure water.
- Children jumped like the animals they saw.
- Children played with toy animals and made up stories.

Stories for adults to mediate

The following stories illustrate how, with adult help, even children aged four and five years can think about complex ideas and develop new understandings about the spiritual aspect of living a good life.

Thukeri as told by Veena Gollan, from the Yaraldi clan of the Ngarrindjeri people (River Murray and Coorong region of South Australia)

The story tells of two tribal men who lived on the shores of Lake Alexandrina. They caught many bream, called 'Thukeri', but refused to share them with a stranger. The stranger put many bones in the Thukeri, so they could not be eaten. The men were shamed and the group punished.

About the story

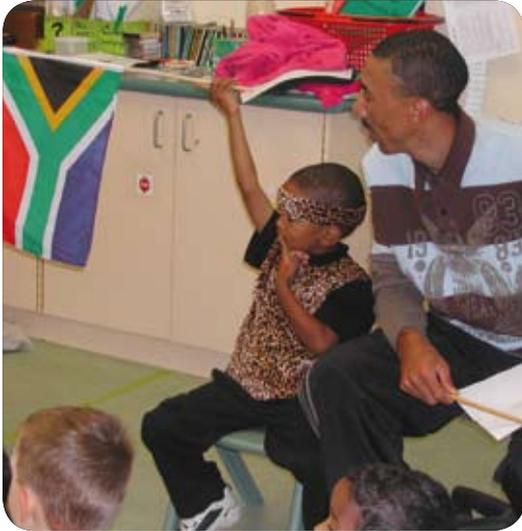
The traditional practices of Indigenous peoples model a balanced way of living with the land. They did not deplete the breeding stock and their harvesting practices supported conservation. The men broke this eco-farming rule, so they had to be punished under the Law.

Key ideas

- ➔ We can live off the land.
- ➔ We should take only what we need.
- ➔ We should share.
- ➔ Everyone in your group is shamed if you do the wrong thing.



'The traditional practices of Indigenous peoples model a balanced way of living with the land.'



Comments

Children were captivated by the combination of visuals, voice and story. They easily understood the messages of not being greedy and sharing, and we used this to reinforce our centre's values about 'sharing, cooperation and being fair to everyone'. In children's block play, for example, we talked about letting everyone have a go and not leaving anyone 'outside' the group.

A few of the younger children were anxious about 'the stranger' in the story. However, this proved a point of valuable discussion. Staff explained that, of course, children shouldn't go with strangers, but adults who don't know each other might talk together.

One parent, with an Asian cultural background, provided wonderful insight and cross-cultural connections when she reassured children: 'They are the Aboriginal people's spiritual Ancestors, just as we have spiritual ancestors who teach and guide us.'

Related activities

- ➔ The group created story maps: children created images from the story (boats, people and the spirit) and advised the teacher how to place the pictures in sequence.
- ➔ Children talked about how the stories made them feel and what feelings are portrayed in the stories. They talked about the significance of them to Indigenous peoples.
- ➔ Teachers explained that these stories are passed down through generations and are part of Indigenous communities' values and beliefs. We explored other stories that are passed through generations in the different cultures present at the centre.
- ➔ Children used blocks and cardboard boxes to make boats. They built them collaboratively and invented complex stories to act-out in them.
- ➔ Teachers provided natural materials, paints and brushes, limiting children's choices to primary colours. They encouraged children to re-tell the stories in paintings and to reflect on what they learned each time.
- ➔ Children watched films about Aboriginal painters and asked for 'fine brushes so we can do that'.

- Children were interested in 'the fish only having bones'. Silver 'scales' were provided and children wove mats, cut out fish shapes and drew fish, placing scales on the bones.
- Sharing emerged as a main interest from *Thukeri*, and other stories (such as *Share said the rooster* and *Little red hen*) and children acted these out. Children played a game with join-up blocks where the goal was to share your blocks with as many people as possible. This was the reverse of the competitive game musical chairs.

Warringe in the sky as told by Steve Comeagain from the Yammatji people (Murchison River area of Western Australia)

A long time ago, there were no stars in the sky. It was just black. The creatures of the earth watched the sun rise and set and did not wonder why. One day, the birds and animals were astonished to see children coming down from the sky, gathering food and playing. The trouble was that the sky children ate so much of the bush tucker that soon there wasn't enough for anyone. Mother Sun became worried and so she created a huge damper which turned a rich orange-yellow as she raised it to the sky. Many of the sky children followed it.

About the story

This is an enchanting tale about the moon, sun and stars in our solar system. It tells how some of the children remained on the ground and became the people of the earth and how others became the stars we see at night. The story explains the waxing and waning of the moon, as the Moon Damper rises in the eastern sky and is slowly eaten every night and a new moon damper is created each month.



Key ideas

- Solar system.
- Day and night.
- The lunar cycle.
- Creation of earth people.

Comments

It became clear that the values, rather than the story content, were the important and lasting teaching point. We talked about Aboriginal values, especially respect for the land and managing resources. We spent more time listening, looking and experiencing our environment. We talked a lot about how things come to be in our world and how we should enjoy and appreciate the natural world, including the sky at night.

Related activities

- ⇒ Children talked about night and day.
- ⇒ Children moved like the animals and the sky children, and like the creatures in other stories. We listened to sounds around us. Children made and cooked damper.
- ⇒ Visitors from other cultures were invited to share their creation stories and songs.

Gelam as told by Lydia George (from the Murray Islands of the Eastern Torres Straits)

A boy keeps the largest pigeons for himself, causing his mother to pretend to be a ghost to frighten him. His father appears to him in a dream, telling him to build a canoe and go far away. He lands on the volcanic island of Mer (Murray Islands) and his mother can still be seen weeping on the shore in the form of a rock.



About the story

The story explains natural events and teaches about family relationships and responsibilities. It introduces understandings about the Spirit world and the power of the ancestors and dreams to guide our actions.

Comments

Children in a rural environment found it difficult to relate to the story because they are unfamiliar with coastal and island environments, and yams, coconuts and clams. They were interested in Gelam's journey and in having to hunt for food. We could pick up on these ideas and introduce children to different environments through film materials, and we could have discussions about the different foods people eat because of what is available.

The children's favourite stories are set on a river, because the river is so important to the local community. They also like stories about animals and how they got their features. Their favourite stories are The Kangaroo and the Porpoise and You and me, Murrawee.

The Creation of Trowenna as told by Leigh Maynard from the Nuenonne people (Bruny Island, Tasmania)

What we call Tasmania began as a very small sandbank in the southern seas. Punywin (the Sun) and Venna (the Moon) travelled across the sky creating life. One day when they rose from the sea near the little island, seeds dropped from them for the great gum tree, Tara Mondaro. The rain fell to help Tara Mondaro grow and then shellfish came. Slowly, over time, Trowenna rose from the ocean. That is Trowenna; that is Tasmania.

About the story

This is a story from the time when all things began to take shape. It tells how Tasmania became the heart-shaped island with the stars, trees, mountains and animals we see today.

Comments

Staff greatly enjoyed the story and appreciated having authentic Tasmanian material. It is important to have local material, because often aspects of mainland productions, such as the use of clapping sticks, are not endemic to Tasmania, nor are the flora and fauna. It is important to reinforce the fact that Tasmania has a continuing history of Aboriginal people, cultures and stories.

The creation story was too complex for the children aged one–three to appreciate, but staff will use ideas from it in their work, and they recommend the stories for people working with older children.

Conclusion

Through this small research project, we have gained insights into how children learn, how Indigenous stories can be a vehicle for grappling with important ideas, and how educators can mediate complex meanings for young children.

The educators in this project provided the following guidance for all early childhood practitioners using the stories:

- *We made sure that staff were very familiar with the stories before showing them to children.*
- *Our staff thought about how children might respond to the stories and how they could support the development of important understandings. But they did not plan too far ahead. We decided to show the first story and see what questions and ideas emerged, and to work from there.*
- *We were amazed at the questions children asked in relation to the stories. For example, children wondered 'What makes the waves?' They suggested that 'A shark or a motor bike makes them'. We researched waves. Other questions included 'How did we get clouds and waterfalls?' and 'What is the kookaburra laughing at?'*
- *We found that children who chose to view a story a number of times were asking 'higher level' questions that led all of us to another way of thinking about the stories.*
- *As a result of the project we have examined our teaching style, the responses from children, and how engagement happens. We became more aware of the need to stop, to look around, to take time to listen; to question and to wait longer for an answer; the need to move, to dance, to paint and make and play, in order to learn and understand.*
- *One of our most significant realisations was how long Indigenous people have been in Australia and that most of us have journeyed to this place, and we all have a responsibility to care for it.*
- *We felt it was important to involve families in the stories, to support their children and also to deepen adults' understanding. We told parents why we were presenting the stories, and what they were about. We showed the DVD when parents came to collect children and had conversations about stories. We spoke about oral storytelling traditions and invited parents to share stories from their own cultures.*

Questions for early childhood carers and educators to reflect upon

- *Is there an age when children can concentrate on and make meaning out of film stories? Is there an age when they can understand non-literal meanings?*
- *Are some stories too sophisticated for young children? However, do we sometimes underestimate what young children can think and talk about, and understand?*
- *Can we find ways to help young children access complex moral and spiritual ideas and dilemmas?*
- *What is the value of engaging young children with abstract ideas that are important for life and living?*
- *Is it easier for children to relate to stories with familiar landscapes, animals and subject matter? How can we help them think about less familiar territory? What can they gain by extending experience beyond their immediate environment?*
- *Who in the community—from Indigenous and other cultures—could help make important beliefs and understandings real for young children?*
- *Are there ways educators, children and families can learn together about, and through, these stories?*



'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories, as the longest continuous record of historic events and spirituality in the world, may offer sustainable and harmonious ways to move forward.'

We live in times when society as a whole is seeking spiritual meaning and a sense of community and when we are struggling to re-establish a balance between human needs and the survival of the natural world.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories, as the longest continuous record of historic events and spirituality in the world, may offer sustainable and harmonious ways to move forward.

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