

## Albert Namatjira

Written and illustrated by Vincent Namatjira

### OVERVIEW

Award-winning artist Vincent Namatjira tells the life story of his great-grandfather, Albert Namatjira, one of Australia's most iconic artists.

Vincent's witty and moving paintings are accompanied by evocative text, which records the pivotal moments in Albert's life. In telling his great-grandfather's story, Vincent builds a compelling picture of the times and conditions in which Albert lived and worked, capturing his triumphs and tragedy against a backdrop of social change and historical injustices.

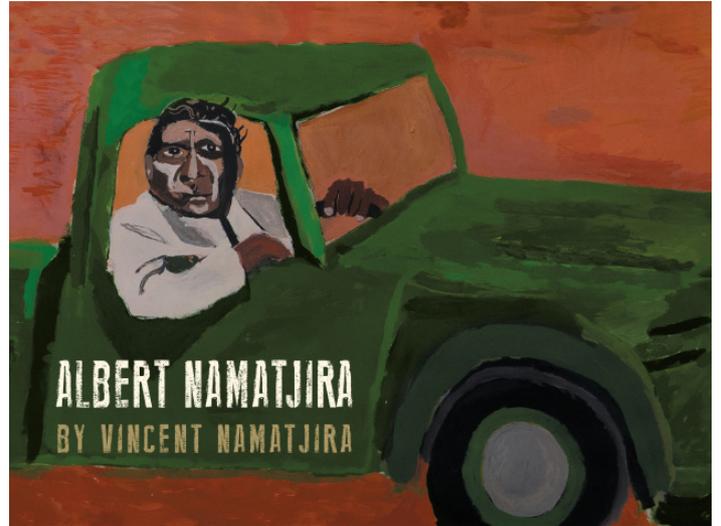
This poignant children's book provides an important tool for discussion about Australia's art history, and a launching pad for exploration of the key moments in Australia's Aboriginal Rights movement.

*Albert Namatjira* is a unique children's picture book of both artistic beauty and historical importance, and will appeal to children, art collectors and those looking for a special gift.

The artwork in this book is part of a body of work called 'Albert's Story' that was acquired by QAGOMA - Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Vincent Namatjira is a Western Aranda painter from Indulkana in South Australia who has gained significant recognition for his work both in Australia and overseas. In 2020 he became the first Indigenous artist to win the Archibald Prize, and was the recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia. In 2019 he was awarded the \$100,000 acquisitive Ramsay Prize at the Art Gallery of South Australia and was a finalist in the Archibald Prize. Vincent is represented by Iwantja Arts.



### THEMES

- Aboriginal Culture; Country, Artwork
- Aboriginal experiences of citizenship
- Art
- Relationships

### AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

The life story of Albert Namatjira is shared sensitively and evocatively in Vincent Namatjira's beautiful homage to his great-grandfather. It is a celebration of the invaluable contribution that Albert Namatjira made not only to the art world, but to the universal understanding of and respect for First Nations People and their cultures. The interplay between words and art reveals a life that was challenging for Albert as he became caught between two worlds. The resounding message in this text, however, is the central place that Country, family and kinship played in his life. The writing style is restrained, inviting the audience to read between the lines and discover an Australia that was slow to recognise Aboriginal citizenship and reticent in its treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. In this way, it is an interesting exploration of experiences of citizenship, perfect for students in Year 6. Used with lower secondary students, it serves as a platform to further investigate Australia's mistreatment and misunderstanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Of special note is the artwork of Vincent Namatjira, bringing an additional layer of merit to the text.

## 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
English	Years 4-8
HASS (History)	Year 6
The Arts (Visual Arts)	Years 5-8

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptors and cross-curriculum priorities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading, examine the cover, end papers and title page of the book. Make predictions about the story and its setting, giving reasons for your ideas.
  - Using both the illustrations and the written text on the first two-page openings, discuss the connection between the author and the subject matter of the text.
  - On a map of Australia, locate Ntaria (Hermannsburg). Use Google Earth to view the surrounding landscape of Ntaria. Find images as well. How is this landscape reflected in the artwork of Albert Namatjira?
  - We are told that Albert was raised on a mission. Use this website to find out more about growing up as an Aboriginal child on a mission. In the role of young Albert, write a journal entry about your childhood experiences.
  - Albert became close friends with an artist from Melbourne named Rex Battarbee. How did this friendship impact on Albert's life? How did this friendship help Rex? Use the illustration below to help in your discussion.
- The text tells us that Albert was able to 'capture the unique light and the beauty of his Country'. What can we tell about the interconnection between people and Country through reading *Albert Namatjira*? What role does Country play in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures? How is respect for Country shown through a text like *Albert Namatjira*? Use companion texts such as *Baby Business* by Jasmine Seymour or *Welcome to Country* by Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy to explore this concept further.
  - Why do you think Albert Namatjira's exhibitions were sell outs? What does this tell us about the significance of his art on the Australian and world stage?
  - At the time when Albert's paintings were first being viewed by the public, 'the people in those cities ... wouldn't have known very much about Aboriginal people living in the outback'. Why do you think this was? Why and how has Australian society changed since those days? What do you believe still needs to change? Discuss.
  - What advantages and disadvantages did entering a Western lifestyle bring for Albert? How are his experiences representative of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences in Australia during this era?
  - Why did Albert get to meet the queen? How do you think he might have felt about this? What can we tell about this experience from the painting below?



## CLASSROOM IDEAS CONT.

- What impact did William Dargie's prize-winning portrait of Albert have on both Albert and the Australian art scene? You can view this portrait [here](#). Discuss Dargie's portrayal of Albert, given what you know from reading *Albert Namatjira*.
- When he was away from his Country, Albert missed home and family. Write a reflection of a time you too felt like this.
- How did you feel when you learnt that Albert was the first Aboriginal person to be made an Australian citizen, even though 'they had been living on their Country for thousands of years'? Why must this have been a 'strange and complicated time' for Albert? Find out more about this [here](#).
- Use *Say Yes: A story of friendship, fairness and a vote for help* by Jennifer Castles and Paul Seden as a companion text to help to unpack Aboriginal citizenship further. As an extension, discuss Aboriginal citizenship in context with the illustration below.



- What effect did Albert's accident that injured his hand have on him?
  - Create a visual representation of the difficulties Albert faced when 'living in two very different worlds'. What other examples of such difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do you know about? How could these hardships have been avoided? Discuss.
- Why do some say Albert 'died of a broken heart'? On the page opening below, why does his great-grandson say, 'I just hope ... he had a window so he could see out to the Country he painted so beautifully'?



- What were Albert's achievements? What are his legacies?
- In pairs, take on the roles of Albert and Vincent Namatjira, meeting for the first time. What conversations would you have with one another?
- After reading *Albert Namatjira*, discuss what you think are the most important things in Albert's life. How do you know? What things do *you* most value? Share with a friend.
- Vincent Namatjira uses a lot of restraint when retelling his great-grandfather's story, especially in terms of the social and historical context surrounding Albert's life. Discuss this writing style, and the space it gives readers to make their own connections.
- Recreate your favourite page opening, carefully adopting the illustrator's style in your drawings.
- View the following BTN clip about the 1967 Referendum. Take notes to help with your understanding.
- Explore Vincent Namatjira's collection of work held by QAGOMA [here](#).
- View Albert Namatjira's artwork [here](#).
- Find out more about the Archibald prize [here](#). View and discuss the work of Vincent Namatjira's winning 2020 portrait [here](#).
- What do you know about your great-grandparents? Find out more about their lives by talking with family members, taking notes about their life journeys. Consider creating an illustrated retelling of one of their lives. Alternatively, create a portrait of someone important to you. Accompany this with a brief written account of their life.



## APPENDIX – LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
4	<b>English</b>
	<b>Literature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (<a href="#">ACELT1602 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul> <b>Literacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (<a href="#">ACELY1692 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul>
5	<b>English</b>
	<b>Literature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify aspects of literary texts that convey details or information about particular social, cultural and historical contexts (<a href="#">ACELT1608 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Create literary texts that experiment with structures, ideas and stylistic features of selected authors (<a href="#">ACELT1798 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul> <b>Literacy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show how ideas and points of view in texts are conveyed through the use of vocabulary, including idiomatic expressions, objective and subjective language, and that these can change according to context (<a href="#">ACELY1698 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Identify and explain characteristic text structures and language features used in imaginative, informative and persuasive texts to meet the purpose of the text (<a href="#">ACELY1701 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul>
6	<b>English</b>
	<b>Literature</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (<a href="#">ACELT1613 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Analyse and evaluate similarities and differences in texts on similar topics, themes or plots (<a href="#">ACELT1614 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul> <b>HASS</b> <b>History</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sequence information about people's lives, events, developments and phenomena using a variety of methods including timelines (<a href="#">ACHASSI125 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Examine primary sources and secondary sources to determine their origin and purpose (<a href="#">ACHASSI126 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues and phenomena in the past and present (<a href="#">ACHASSI127 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrants, women and children (<a href="#">ACHASSK135 - Scootle</a>)</li><li>• The contribution of individuals and groups to the development of Australian society since Federation (<a href="#">ACHASSK137 - Scootle</a>)</li></ul>



## APPENDIX – LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

- Yrs 5-6 The Arts**  
**Visual Arts**
- Explore ideas and practices used by artists, including practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent different views, beliefs and opinions ([ACAVAM114 - Scootle](#))

- 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 - Scootle](#))
  - Compare the ways that language and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts ([ACELT1621 - Scootle](#))
  - Discuss aspects of texts, for example their aesthetic and social value, using relevant and appropriate metalanguage ([ACELT1803 - Scootle](#))
  - Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches ([ACELT1622 - Scootle](#))

- 8 English**  
**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 - Scootle](#))
  - Explore the interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors ([ACELT1806 - Scootle](#))

- Yr 7-8 The Arts**  
**Visual Arts**
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their art-making, starting with Australian artworks including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ([ACAVAR124 - Scootle](#))

### Cross-Curriculum Priority – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

