

Shirley Purdie: Ngaginybe Jarragbe, My Story

Written & illustrated by Shirley Purdie

OVERVIEW

Told in English and Gija, this is Shirley Purdie's life story, told alongside her stunning paintings. In *Ngaginybe Jarragbe, My Story*, Shirley shares vignettes of her life growing up on Mabel Downs station, and her Gija Culture, Country and Dreaming. She explains her Dreaming is Echidna Dreaming and she teaches us about bush fruit and hunting. She also shares the story of her working life, as a maid in the homestead on Mabel Downs station, and later in life as an artist, and how her mum taught her how to paint her Country.

This is Shirley Purdie's first children's picture book. When asked about what it means to share her story with children, Shirley said "good to put it in painting, your Country, so kids can know and understand. When the old people die, young people can read the stories from the paintings. They can learn from the paintings and maybe they want to start painting too."

This is the first book in the Kimberley Art Centre Series. The series focuses on developing the skills of Kimberley Aboriginal artists in children's picture book storytelling and illustration.

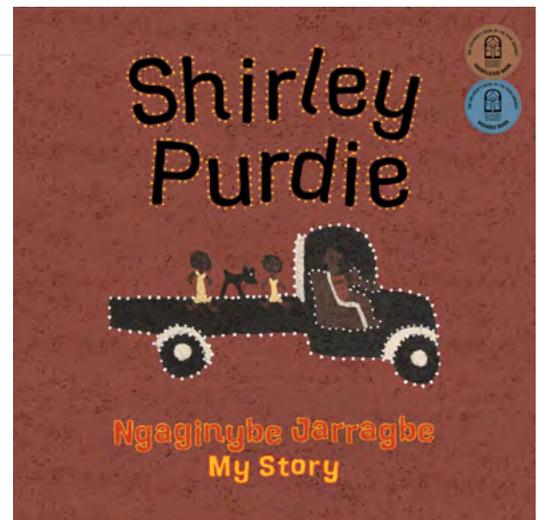
Notable points

- Beautifully textured artworks that young and old will love
- Book release to coincide with the re-hanging of 26 of Shirley's paintings in the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra
- Series on community engagement programs based on *My Story* delivered by the gallery

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Shirley Purdie has been painting for more than twenty years and is an artist of increasing significance and seniority. Her cultural knowledge and artistic skills complement each other to produce a practice that holds great strength. Shirley is also a prominent leader in Warmun community and an incisive cross-cultural communicator.

Inspired by more senior Warmun artists including her late mother, the great Madigan Thomas, as well as Rover Thomas and Queenie McKenzie. Much of her work explores spirituality and the relationship between Gija conceptions of Ngarranggarni (Dreaming) and Catholicism. In 2007 Shirley was awarded the Blake Prize for Religious Art for her major work Stations of the Cross.



THEMES

- Family History
- Importance of Elders
- Cultural practices
- Dreaming & Importance of Place
- Food
- History - Pastoral Era

WRITING STYLE & AUDIENCE

Written in an autobiographical style, 'Ngaginybe Jarragbe, My Story' is Shirley Purdie's recollection of her life. It records key moments and aspects of her experience and identity as a Gija woman and artist living in the Kimberley from the 20th century until now. Incorporating Gija language, the text is detailed and rich but easily accessible. Shirley's powerful and distinctive ochre illustrations create an evocative representation of Gija culture and country. It is suitable for the middle primary literacy classroom, however could also be accessed by younger children and themes such as the pastoral era and the Indigenous art scene could be explored more deeply by older students.

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	3-4

The appendix expands on the relevant English content descriptions, while also highlighting cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

CULTURAL NOTES

Language

Shirley's first language is Gija, one of 250 Indigenous Australian language groups. Gija is classified as an endangered language along with around 106 others.

Location

Gija country extends from an area north of Warmun in the upper reaches of the Ord and Dunham Rivers and much of the Argyle Diamond Mine, south to Halls Creek, west to Lansdowne and Tableland stations and east to the world heritage listed Purnululu National Park.

Dreaming

The word 'Dreaming' is often used for a concept with very many different names in different Aboriginal languages. It refers to a people's spiritual and social framework. In Gija, this framework is called the Ngarranggarni. It can also refer to 'a time when the landscape took its present form and the rules for living came into being' (Kofod, Gija dictionary 2016). Dreaming stories are an important way that these rules of living, treating each other and the land are maintained, passed on and taught.

Country

In Gija culture, responsibility for specific parts of the country is inherited from someone's parents and ancestors. This custodianship means people have the right

to speak for, tell the stories of and make decisions about these parts of Gija land. It might not be where they were born or even where they live now.

Pastoral Era

Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley during the pastoral era worked as stockmen and domestic workers on vast cattle stations in their country. They were paid in rations of food and clothes and often treated very badly by the station owners. Shirley features in a video on the Warmun Art Centre website that gives some more detail about Aboriginal people's experience at this time: <https://vimeo.com/94108281>

Corroboree

In Gija culture there are different forms of dance or 'corroboree' as Shirley calls it. Some names of these are wangga, moonga-moonga and joonba. The most commonly performed now is joonba. They are usually based on narratives and involve different roles for men and women who wear different costumes, different body paint and carry specific objects as they dance. This is an online resource about joonba in the Kimberley: <https://art.uts.edu.au/index.php/exhibitions/joonba-junba-juju/>

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Tune in discussion

Discuss the meaning of 'story' and autobiography using definitions. How does the meaning change when it becomes 'my story' or 'your story'? What can we learn about someone when they tell their story? Why is it important that people are able to tell their story? Can you think of any other books we have read about people's own stories? People's stories often give lots of clues about where they live and their culture. If you were to write your own story, what would you include about your place and culture? Shirley is a grandmother now. What do students know about their own grandparents' story?

Book walk

A book walk is a shared reading activity done prior to reading an unfamiliar text. It helps to spark students' interest and give students an opportunity to begin thinking about or anticipate the story while making connections and activating prior knowledge. A book walk involves the teacher 'walking' through the text along with students, including studying the front and back covers, table of contents, sample of pages, headings or bolded information, and illustrations in a text. During this time, text and graphic features are identified and discussed and students are encouraged to predict the themes of the text.



CLASSROOM IDEAS CONT.

Connections

An accomplished reader is always making connections; they recognise the reticular nature of knowledge and actively note themes and similarities as they emerge. Students can learn how to make effective connections, and how to group these connections into three categories:

1. **Text-to-self** connections relate ideas learned in a text with a student's own experiences or ideas.
2. **Text-to-text** connections are recurring words or ideas within a book.
3. **Text-to-world** connections are links between ideas in a text and other domains of knowledge.

After the book walk and the first reading, and with the aforementioned categories in mind, students create three annotated illustrations showing their connections with the story. Divide a blank piece of paper into three sections and ask students to illustrate how they connect with the text.

Character Mind Map

Students create a mind map about Shirley. What can they infer about her from what is shown and told in the story? What else would they like to know about her?

Letter to the author

Students write a letter to Shirley detailing the thoughts and feelings that have been generated for them by reading her story. This could also be an opportunity to ask Shirley questions about her life and the way she chose to tell her story through words and art.

Book Review

As a shared writing activity, construct a simple recommendation for the text that will be sent to the school's library for display. Use sentence beginnings such as:

'The things liked about the book are...' and 'Things we didn't like about the book are...'. Ask the students to include a recommendation for who might enjoy the book.

GRAMMAR EXAMINATION

Students find examples of the following language features in the text:

Feature	Example
1st person perspective	'I am Shirley Purdie.'
doing verbs in the past tense record life events	'My mother danced with the women at Mabel Downs.'
Events often unfold in chronological order	'I sold my first painting and got better and better. Now I am a famous artist.'
Possessive noun groups help introduce significant people and important cultural concepts	'My mother's country is Baluwah (Violet Valley).' 'My dreaming is echidna dreaming and fire dreaming.'
Adjectives help evaluate people, events or register feelings	'It was hard learning all I needed to know.'
Prepositional phrases anchor events in time and place and enrich the text	'A long time ago my mother danced with the women at Mabel Downs.'
Nouns are sometimes given more meaning using articles and adjectives	'a famous artist' 'important places'



HELP THEM TELL THEIR STORY

Tell students they are going to interview an older person in their life and help them write and illustrate their autobiography. This could be a grandparent, uncle or aunty, neighbour or someone else in their life. The structure of Shirley Purdie's text is to be used as a guide. It should include important details of their life organised in chronological order. It should also incorporate one or two favourite anecdotes. Help students brainstorm a list of questions to ask their older person. The questions should draw information such as important people in their lives, significant events and things and items or activities that represent them. Students then interview their chosen older person (with their permission, this should be recorded). Once the interview has been completed and transcribed, it can then be used as a reference to create the autobiographical text. As it is meant to be written from the older person's perspective it is crucial that they are happy with the text before it is 'published'. Invite the older people in for a book launch and reading.

APPENDIX

Year	Learning Area
3	Language <ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand how different types of texts vary in use of language choices, depending on their purpose and context (for example, tense and types of sentences) (ACELA1478 - Scootle)Understand that verbs represent different processes, for example doing, thinking, saying, and relating and that these processes are anchored in time through tense (ACELA1482 - Scootle) Literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none">Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning and begin to evaluate texts by drawing on a growing knowledge of context, text structures and language features (ACELY1680 - Scootle)Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features and selecting print, and multimodal elements appropriate to the audience and purpose (ACELY1682 - Scootle)
4	Language <ul style="list-style-type: none">Understand how texts vary in complexity and technicality depending on the approach to the topic, the purpose and the intended audience (ACELA1490 - Scootle)Understand that the meaning of sentences can be enriched through the use of noun groups/phrases and verb groups/phrases and prepositional phrases (ACELA1493 - Scootle) Literacy <ul style="list-style-type: none">Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning to expand content knowledge, integrating and linking ideas and analysing and evaluating texts (ACELY1692 - Scootle)Plan, draft and publish imaginative, informative and persuasive texts containing key information and supporting details for a widening range of audiences, demonstrating increasing control over text structures and language features (ACELY1694 - Scootle)

Cross curriculum priorities

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
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General Capabilities

- Literacy, Critical and creative thinking, Intercultural understanding
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