

# THE DUNGGIIRR BROTHERS AND THE CARING SONG OF THE WHALE

by Aunty Shaa Smith and Yandaarra

## Cultural Safety

Before you begin, carefully consider the steps you can take to ensure that you are providing a culturally safe and inclusive space for everybody in your classroom and school. This may include undertaking cultural competency training, bringing First Nations Australian speakers into your classroom, and reading widely and proactively to self-educate yourself.

**RECOMMENDED FOR:** 7-12 years old **Years 2-6, PRIMARY**

**THEMES:** Aboriginal sovereignty, Country, belonging, history, stories, Indigenous stories, family and community.

**ISBN:** 9781760526313

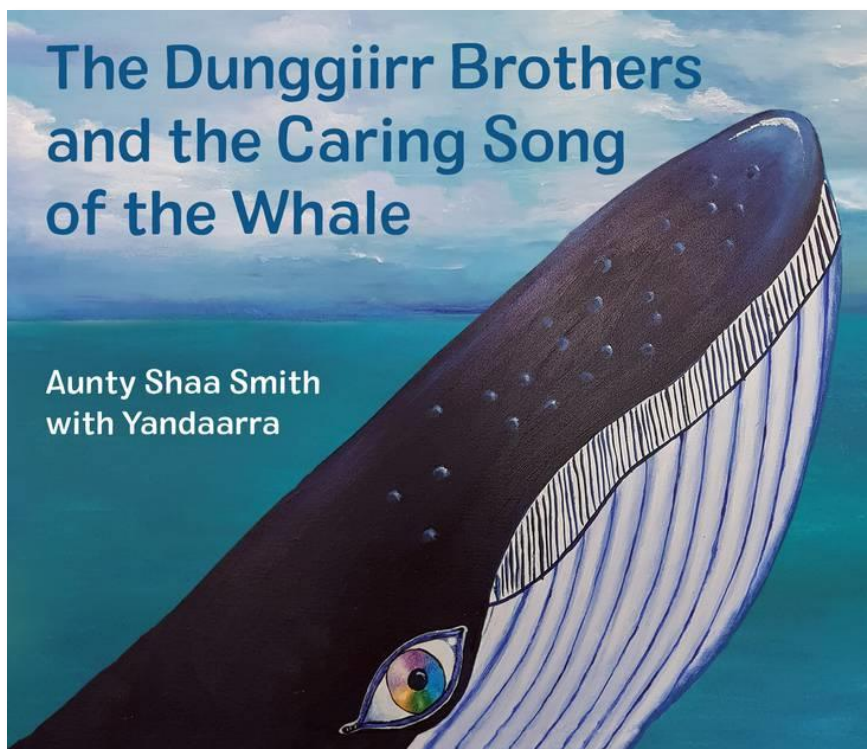
**CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:**

- **CROSS CURRICULUM:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- **CROSS CURRICULUM:** Sustainability
- **ENGLISH:** Literature and literacy

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# INTRODUCTION

*Welcome to Ngambaa Country on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. I am Aunty Shaa and this is the story of the Koala Brothers, the Dungguirr Brothers. This is the story of our Country. We live the story of being saved by Dungguirr and we do a ceremony to keep it alive. It is this story and memory we share with you in this book.*

This stunning picture book from the Yandaarra collective, a project led by Gumbaynggirr Elder Aunty Shaa Smith with her daughter Neeyan Smith and Uncle Bud Marshall, in association with the University of Newcastle, helps us learn some stories of the mid-north NSW coast and their messages about caring for Country. *The Dungguirr Brothers and the Caring Song of the Whale* also spreads a welcome and beautiful message of care and understanding to the wider community.

## A WORD FROM AUNTY SHAA SMITH AND YANDAARRA

Yandaarra is a Gumbaynggirr word for a group going together, shifting camp together. This is also the name for our research and work together.

Yandaarra, the research, is a re-creation story. It's about remembering what was (what is) as part of this re-creating. This work is about honouring Elders and Custodians past, present and future. Guidance from them is so important; it's timeless, relevant forever. Stories don't belong to one time but for all time. This story that Yandaarra are living now, the research, is relevant for then and now and for the future.

**The core of Yandaarra is to understand together how to live on and in relationship with Mother Earth and each other.**

To form this relationship, one has to know one's place. We are at a point where a radical shift is necessary, to learn how to live on and with Mother Earth in a better way.

When this shifting happens, it needs to occur on many different levels: in our lives, our dreams, our work, our homes and our families, and through broader structures that can allow a genuinely respectful coming together.

The aim of Yandaarra's research is to build a better understanding of what a Gumbaynggirr-led Caring for Country might look like today.

**This involves the collaborative development and trialling of resources and protocols to help support natural resource management organisations to attend more deeply to Indigenous ideas of Country, and to Country itself.**

Ceremony is at the heart of Yandaarra and of Aunty Shaa and her daughter Neeyan's commitment to it, as they seek to bring Ceremony back to Country, caring for Gumbaynggirr People and Country in this way. For non-Gumbaynggirr co-researchers, coming into consciousness together involves supporting Gumbaynggirr-led processes and coming into relationship with Country and Gumbaynggirr people.

As we work together, we acknowledge Country and our Ancestors. We send our respect to Gumbaynggirr Country, who holds and guides us, and to the Custodians of Gumbaynggirr Country from the past, the present and the future, all of whom are with us now.

We have sat in circle, yarned together, planted trees, reflected, gathered food, laughed and shared. When we look to how to shift camp – or shift our practices, relationships and ways of thinking about the land, we know:

**Using Gumbaynggirr Dreaming and Protocols is key.**

# CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

## BEFORE READING

### SET THE SCENE

To support learning and create a caring and sharing environment, try sitting in a circle with students to discuss these points and undertake these activities. This small change brings a fresh perspective to the learning experience.

You might also want to sit outside if possible and invite an Elder or other Custodian to support your learning.

Aunty Shaa and Neeyan have contributed their thoughts throughout these notes. Their comments (highlighted in blue) add context and can be shared with students.

### PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF FIRST NATIONS CULTURE AND HISTORY

- What is an Acknowledgement of Country? How might you acknowledge Country?

Aunty Shaa says that, for her, an acknowledgement is about finding the place in your heart where you can say hello to the Country that you are living on and learning with.

- What is a Welcome to Country? What is the difference between a Welcome to Country and an Acknowledgement of Country?

A Welcome to Country is something that is offered by Aboriginal people who are from the Country you are on, the Custodians of that place. An Acknowledgement is something that everyone can do to respect Country and Aboriginal people.

Aunty Shaa says that she believes an Acknowledgement is just as important to do as a Welcome. This really supports a shift in how to relate to Country and how to respond to Country's gifts.

An Acknowledgement is about respect. It is like acknowledging someone important, like you would acknowledge your parents or a leader. It is like that with Country. It is important to acknowledge her and support her so she can care for you, know you and look after you. It is about opening up to Country. That is what this book is about – getting the children to know that Country is important.

When we can acknowledge Country, Country can acknowledge us. She looks after us, she provides for us, she gives us water, the winds that carry seeds and give life. In your Acknowledgement you can say thank you to Country. An Acknowledgment is about feeling Country. It is not something just to do as a token gesture. The lesson is sometimes missed if people don't feel it. A true Acknowledgement must come from your heart.

- Why is it important to Acknowledge Country and be Welcomed onto Country?

Acknowledging Country and being Welcomed to Country are about respect. It is teaching children to understand the importance of respect: respect for people around you, respect for yourself and respect for those who have been Custodians, are Custodians and will be Custodians of Country. It is about respecting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have looked after this land for tens of thousands of years and who are hoping that you will look after the land too, hoping that we all take on a responsibility to look after the earth and each other.

- When do we make an Acknowledgement of Country at school? What Country is your school on?

An Acknowledgement is about respecting the land and all the life – the animals, rocks, plants, stories and winds, everything – that lives where you live and learn.

- What are some ways you could respectfully respond to being Welcomed to Country? What responsibilities might you have after being Welcomed into Country?

There are many ways to respond after being Welcomed or doing your Acknowledgement. The most important thing is to feel it in your heart and be true in what you do.

Responding could be saying hello to the life there. Or you might like to do something, plant something, think of something practical, giving back to Country. As a teacher, you could give some responsibilities around caring for a tree or suggest other caring activities.

Another way to respond would be to grow the relationship with the lizard or the tree. 'Hello lizard?' you might say. 'Have you got a story for me today, tree, waterhole, or lizard?' It may not have a story for you – until one day it might. You could have that lesson going for a week or more. Students could go out each day, practise talking to the tree, opening their imagination, opening their connections, building their relationships with place. Going to the place repeatedly may help them go into a heart place around it.

- When we use an Acknowledgement of Country, we talk about paying 'respect to Elders past, present and emerging (or future)'. Why might we do that?

It is important to acknowledge that this always was and always will be Aboriginal Land. Speaking of past, present and future also helps with becoming aware and respecting a line of culture through the ages. Our Elders are the ones who carry culture on, our culture survives.

We are part of the oldest living culture on the planet. Our Elders are keeping our stories alive as they pass the stories on to the children and they become Elders and so on, in turn. Elders are our wisdom holders. That is a responsibility, Gumbaynggirr way. The children have that responsibility to learn and to become a leader in their culture.

Our Ancestors, our Elders of the past are still here in the now. They are not gone but they keep guiding us. Part of respecting them, for us, is believing that the Ancestors are still walking. The learnings they passed down keep us strong.

## LEARNING FROM ELDERS

- Invite a local First Nations Elder or Custodian to visit your school and deliver a Welcome to Country or to share some of their stories. The event could be guided by local Custodians and what they would like to share and see happen. Please make sure they are paid appropriately. For more information visit the [AIATSIS website](#).

What life is on your playground? Take some time to learn about that, to feel that, and to build some relationships. Talk to the lizard, talk to the bird, talk to the tree and then you will learn how to talk to them. It is learning how to talk to Country and listen. It is not a silly thing to do to talk to Country. Kids know this. 'Hello lizard, hello Country.

Hello bird, hello Country.'

Part of the pre-learning could be to get the students to respect that. The teacher could choose a part of the playground for the students to spend time, to look after it, talk to the trees, connect with it, with the worms, spiders and birds. Spending time with Country is respecting Country. Learning to listen and talk to Country is respect.

## LEARNING MORE ABOUT COUNTRY

- Purchase a copy of the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia to find out more about the language, social or nation groups of Aboriginal Australia. Ask students to find out:
  - What Country is our school on?
  - What Country is your home on?
  - What are the Countries that neighbour the Country you live on? Where do they meet?

Through generations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have passed down stories about the creation of land, water, animals and humans on Country. These stories live today and share messages about how to live creatively and respectfully with Country now.

- If you are Aboriginal, have you been told any of these stories by your own family? Have Elders and other Custodians shared stories with you or your class? How do these stories invite you to think about and do things differently?
- Is there a language centre in your area or any books featuring local creation stories? Are there any places with signage sharing stories from the Country where you live?

Find out if there is a story of that place. You could connect with Elders in your place, invite an Elder in. When you know something about a place you can Acknowledge the story. To learn the Dreaming story of the place, to learn about the Country you are sitting on, helps you to understand place, to understand what Country you are sitting on, the language group. Acknowledging Country helps that person know and respect the Lore/Law story of that place.

## READING TIME

Today we are going to read a story from the area where Ngambaa and Gumbaynggirr Countries meet. This area is on the mid-north coast of NSW, near Nambucca Heads. It is a creation story that has been passed down for generations. Aunty Shaa Smith wants to pass it on to future generations so that it is never forgotten and that it is lived on Gumbaynggirr Country every day.

## ON THE COVER

Show the cover of the book to students, read the title aloud and ask the following:

- What animals can you see on the cover?
- Do you think these animals are going to do something special and important?
- Do you think they are working together? What might they be saying to each other?
- What in the cover or title tells you these things?
- What do you think Dungiirr might mean?
- How do you think this story might make you feel?
- What on the cover made you think it would make you feel \_\_\_\_ [insert relevant emotion]?

Listen to [this recording](#) of *The Dungiirr Brothers and the Caring Song of the Whale* to help you pronounce these words properly

# ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES



## Family

Aunty Shaa says, 'Country is family. It is the family of people and animals. It is the family of land, sea, sand, mountain and air.'

- What does family mean to you?
- What do you think are important ways to care for family?
- Is there something special about the way Aunty Shaa talks about family?
- Do you often see this kind of family represented in books that you read?
- How do you think Aunty Shaa and her family treat Country, the land and animals around them if they consider it family?
- Why do you think Aunty Shaa is referred to as 'Aunty'?

This is a sign of respect. Aunty Shaa is teaching us and is our Elder. In Gumbaynggirr, our Aunties are like our second mother. They are our teachers; they look after us like our mother would. That is why we call them Aunty. It is a form of showing respect.

- What is special about your family?
- What might you learn from this book about family relationships?

## History and Geography:

Aunty Shaa says, 'Country ... is our love and dreams. It is our stories and memories.'

- What does Aunty Shaa's map of Ngambaa and Gumbaynggirr Countries have in common with other maps you have seen before?
- How does it differ from other maps?
- Why do you think Aunty Shaa has included information about her Uncles, Aunties, mother and grandmother on this map?

Our relationships to Country are very important. In our book, we have mapped the Dreaming place where the story place is and where we are located when we hold the ceremony. This map is a way of showing Country, sharing and showing some special places.

Gumbaynggirr people have many special sites, special landscapes of great meaning that are sacred. That is what we have mapped. That is very different from a lot of common maps you might see. The map holds the story. That is why it is so significant. It holds the story that holds the law. That is how we map places, by their significance.

The map is kept alive in the ceremony also. Gumbaynggirr people map places of great significance, for their stories, their songlines, their ceremonies. We still hold ceremony. We hold ceremony just by telling the story, by doing the map.

### Role of Culture

Explore connections between identity and cultural values and beliefs and the expression of these connections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

### Socialising

Interact with peers, the teaching team and visiting Elders/community members about aspects of personal worlds, such as experiences at school, home, everyday routines, interests and activities.

### Geography

How the stories of families and the past can be communicated, for example, through photographs, artefacts, books, oral histories, digital media and museums.

### Inquiry Skills: Communicating and Evaluating

Acknowledging and learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of representing and sharing observations.

- Draw a map of your school playground using your own stories and memories of people to highlight places.
- How do different kinds of maps tell different stories and share different kinds of information about places? What is special about maps that include information about memories and relationships?
- You might be able to find some different maps from First Nations people that tell stories and relationships differently.

## ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: SUSTAINABILITY



### Caring for Country:

'Our intention is to live the story and the law that is in the story. We want to invite a lot of people to do the same thing, to look after the earth and each other.'

- How do you think you might be able to care for Country better where you live? Make a list of things that could be done at home and at school. Place the list in a prominent spot in your classroom for everyone to see.

### Ceremony:

- What ceremonies have been important in your life, in your culture?
- What has it meant to you?

Ceremony is a time where we are practising being balanced, in harmony with all living things, we are celebrating life. We want the children to understand ceremony is important and it can be practised – children can do it.

Ceremony is a place of harmony where you put aside all your arguments, all your conflicts, all your disagreements, fears and worries. In ceremony, you can come into a place of harmony where you can then practise love for each other and all living things, a place where we can practise sharing, a place where you look after each other and respect each other. We are celebrating life, life is important. Ceremony is about balancing life, making life happen; we are in life, we are creative in this new place of ceremony. It is the place where the kids can celebrate different beings, like the tree. It is alive. We must look after that tree because the tree looks after us.

Kids might want to do something, a poem, a drawing and share it in circle, to help them be comfortable sharing with each other in a respectful way.

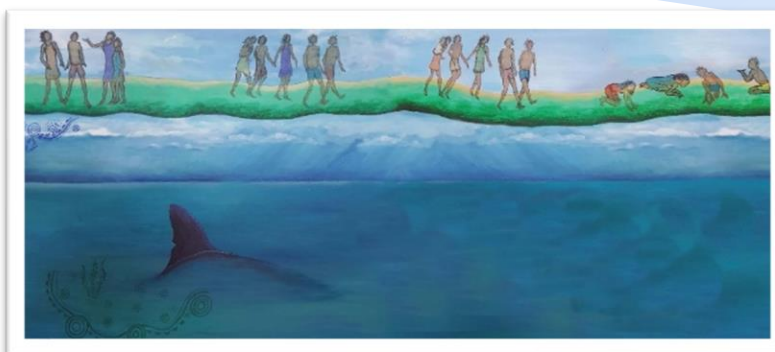
Kids might also want to do an Acknowledgement to Gumbaynggirr saying thank you for the learning that has come through the book. They might want to write a letter to Aunty Shaa or to Gumbaynggirr Country. What would you say to thank Country for this learning?

#### Country/Place

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place and have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.

#### Geography

The Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country/Place on which the school is located and why Country/Place is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



# ENGLISH

## LITERATURE

### Language: [Questions for Older Students]

- How is tense – past and present – presented to show how creation time is lived today? [Answer: the tense moves around in the book. It shifts between past and present. The pictures also show the ways that stories live in the landscapes of today.]
- Go through all the words and work out what they mean. Click on this link to listen to a recording of how to say them: [Listen to The Dunggiirr Brothers and the Caring Song of the Whale](#)
- What is the original language of the place where your school is or where you live?

## LITERACY

### Comprehension

Read the book through once, slowly, before asking students:

- Why do you think Aunty Shaa and her family perform a ceremony to tell the story of the Dunggiirr Brothers and the Caring Song of the Whale?
- What sort of things do they do in the ceremony to tell the story?
- What do the Dunggiirr Brothers and Gurruuja, the whale, teach us about caring for all living things?
- How did this story make you feel after we finished reading it?

### Visual Literacy:

- Look closely at the double-page image accompanying Aunty Shaa's invitation to 'come into the creation time now'. How is the meeting of past, present and future shown in this image? [Answer: by combining photography and painting.]

We live our life in cycles. It is like the Elders past, present and future. It is present now; the Dreaming is forever present. There is no distinct past, present and future. The Ancestors and being in this Dreaming story are with us always. That is why I say the stories belong to all time. They don't belong to a past time. It is not an event that happened in the past. It is an event that happens always. This is also why we Acknowledge Country. It is forever feeding us knowledge, opening us up more to give us more. It is knowledge that is relevant for today, for always.

- Look at the giant image of Gurruuja on the following page, singing the caring song. How has music been shown here? What other ways can you 'show' music being sung or performed?
- Looking at the picture of the koalas, what is this picture telling you about the Dunggiirr Brothers? Do they look capable, knowledgeable and cooperative? How does this image compare to the way you have seen koalas shown in other books?
- Why do you think Neeyan is shown putting Zeek's hand on the handprint on the koala mosaic?



### Expressing and developing ideas

Understand how ideas can be expanded and sharpened through careful choice of verbs, elaborated tenses and a range of adverb phrases.

### Communicating

Represent and communicate observations and ideas in a variety of ways.

### Explore ideas and practices used by artists

Exploring cross-media effects and characteristics of representation when making artworks inspired by observation or imagination.



## ABOUT THE CREATORS:

Aunty Shaa Smith is a Gumbaynggirr woman and story holder for her Country. Her mother is Gumbaynggirr and her father Bundjalung. Aunty Shaa is an artist, cultural facilitator, and Aunty to many. Led by the Old Fellas and Country itself, Aunty Shaa's work shares the deep relevance of Gumbaynggirr Dreaming for today. She is the co-founder of Gumbaynggirr Jagun, sits on the Board of Directors as Chairperson and is lead cultural facilitator. Aunty Shaa also leads Yandaarra, a research collaboration with the University of Newcastle on Gumbaynggirr Country.

In Gumbaynggirr language, Yandaarra means 'to shift camp together.' Yandaarra is a collaboration led by Aunty Shaa Smith under the guidance of the Old Fellas and Gumbaynggirr Country, with Uncle Bud Marshall and Aunty Shaa's daughter Neeyan Smith. Yandaarra includes non-Gumbaynggirr academics Sarah Wright, Lara Daley, and Paul Hodge from the University of Newcastle, sitting on Awabakal and Worimi Countries.

Please see [www.gumbaynggirrjagun.org](http://www.gumbaynggirrjagun.org) for more information.

## CORRESPONDING RESOURCES

Aunty Shaa and Neeyan have a website: <https://www.gumbaynggirrjagun.org>. On the website there are also academic articles which give some additional context for the book and some further information about Yandaarra and Gumbaynggirr Jagun.

You might also want to visit the website of [Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative](http://www.muurrbay.org.au). Muurrbay is in Nambucca Heads on Gumbaynggirr Country. It has many resources and aims to support Aboriginal people in the revival and maintenance of their language and culture.

