



Jiritju Fourmile, *Gurrl the Storm Bird*
Photographer Pete Wallis

FIRST NATIONS STORYTELLING CARING FOR COUNTRY

ARTISTS IN CLASSROOMS

TEACHER BRIEFING

About the Workshop

Trevor Fourmile – Gimuy Walubara Yidinji man – and **Nadine McDonald-Dowd** – Yuwi woman – guide students in an exploration of storytelling as a dynamic and living cultural practice vital to First Nations and Torres Strait Islander stories.

Through this experience, students engage with how stories can carry knowledge, perspectives and connections across time, supporting continuity and shared understanding within communities. The workshop will use a variety of art forms including movement, drama and visual art.

Duration: 60 minutes

Teachers – What You Need to Know

- Teaching Artists will lead the session, and teachers are warmly invited to support students and participate where appropriate.
- The workshop uses storytelling, drama, movement and visual arts to explore ideas through active, creative learning.
- Activities encourage embodied, sensory and imaginative learning.
- Students are encouraged to participate at their own pace.
- Participation is always voluntary. Teachers are encouraged to support students in ways that best meet their individual needs.

Curriculum Connections

General Capabilities

- Intercultural Understanding
- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Personal and Social Capability

Cross Curriculum Priorities

This workshop is designed to amplify and extend the following curriculum priorities and learning areas:

Cross Curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

- **English:** Students explore Aboriginal cultural knowledge, traditions, and experiences as represented and communicated through traditional, modern, and contemporary texts.
- **The Arts:** Students learn about the distinctiveness and diversity of First Nations Australians' cultural practices and artistic expressions, which represent unique ways of being, knowing, thinking, and doing. They examine how First Nations artists use materials, forms, and technologies in innovative ways to celebrate culture, challenge perspectives, and communicate ideas.
- Through this exploration, students gain insight into how First Nations Australians continue to practice and revitalise their cultures, and how historical and contemporary events have shaped them. They also learn about the significant contributions of First Nations Australians to Australian identity and how these contributions are acknowledged locally, nationally, and globally. Engaging with these voices fosters authentic collaboration with artists, creative practitioners, and knowledge holders.

All workshops will be aligned with the appropriate curriculum links for the year level.

Preparing for the Workshop

To help students get the most out of this experience, we kindly ask teachers to support the following preparation activities:

Protocols for Engaging with First Nations Artworks in the Classroom

When exploring First Nations artworks in the classroom, it's important to follow cultural protocols to ensure respect and authenticity. Here are some key guidelines based on Queensland Department of Education policies and the Australian Curriculum (Version 9) for The Arts (Prep–Year 6):

1. Ask First – Connect with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to seek guidance and permissions before using cultural stories, symbols, or artworks.
2. Respect Cultural Ownership – First Nations art belongs to specific communities. Avoid copying or using artworks without permission, and always acknowledge the original creators.
3. Teach Cultural Diversity – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse. Share that each Nation has its own unique traditions, stories, and artistic styles.
4. Use Art Ethically – Ensure children understand that some symbols, stories, and styles have deep cultural meaning and should not be altered or misrepresented.
5. Celebrate Cultural Connections – Encourage children to appreciate First Nations art as a living, evolving tradition that connects people to Country, stories, and identity.

Before the Workshop

This workshop invites children to learn through embodied, sensory and creative experiences while developing an appreciation of the importance of Connection to Country, storytelling and culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Students will explore how stories have been used for thousands of years to share knowledge, explain the world, teach important lessons and strengthen connections between people, Country and community. The workshop introduces Dreaming stories as an important part of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, recognising that these stories are unique to different Nations and language groups across Australia.

The activities below are suggested as preparation for the workshop and can be adapted to suit the age, interests and learning needs of your students.

Key Words

Respect • Elders • Country • Nature • Culture • Connection • Responsibility • Consequences

Key Questions

- What do you see and hear in the natural world around you?
- How do stories help us learn important lessons?
- Why are stories passed from one generation to the next?
- Why is it important to listen to and learn from Elders?
- How can stories help us understand the places where we live?

Purpose

Students will:

- explore Dreaming stories as an important form of cultural storytelling
- make connections between stories, Country and community
- use their imagination to create and share their own stories inspired by the natural world.

Activity 1 – Introduce Dreaming Stories

Invite students to share what they already know.

Suggested discussion questions:

- What Dreaming stories have you heard? (For example, *The Rainbow Serpent* or *How the Birds Got Their Colours*.)
- What do these stories teach us?
- Why are Dreaming stories important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- How are places such as rivers, mountains, waterholes or Uluru connected to stories?
- Why are many Dreaming stories connected to particular places?
- What values, responsibilities or ways of caring for Country do these stories teach?

Teacher Note: Dreaming stories belong to specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations and language groups. Where possible, select a story connected to the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which your school is located. These stories are living cultural knowledge and should be shared respectfully.

Activity 2 – Read a Dreaming Story

Read a Dreaming story that is appropriate for your students and, where possible, connected to your local area or learning context.

Activity 3 – A Classroom Yarning Circle

A yarnning circle is a respectful way of listening, sharing ideas and learning together. While schools cannot replicate the full cultural significance of yarnning practices, using a yarnning circle can encourage students to listen carefully, take turns, and value each person's contribution. For more information: QCAA – Yarning Circles

Resources

- Small stones (or paper circles)
- Picture cards or stickers
- Basket or container
- Markers or pencils

Step 1

Gather students together in a circle.

Explain that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities use yarnning as a respectful way of sharing stories, listening to others and building understanding.

Step 2

Invite students to reflect on storytelling.

Ask questions such as:

- What is your favourite story? Why?
- Who tells you stories?
- How are stories shared? (Books, spoken stories, family stories, songs or made-up stories.)
- How do stories make you feel?
- What important lessons have you learnt from stories?

Step 3

Give each child a stone or paper circle and invite them to draw a simple image such as a sun, tree, bird, animal or rainbow.

Alternatively, provide picture cards or stickers.

Step 4

Place all the stones or cards into a basket.

Explain that everyone will work together to create a new story.

Step 5

Choose the first stone and begin the story.

For example:

"One day, beneath a bright morning sun..."

Step 6

Each student selects a stone or card and adds the next part of the story inspired by their image.

For example:

"A little bird flew to the tree and began building a nest."

The teacher supports students by asking questions where needed.

Step 7

Continue until everyone has contributed, then work together to create an ending.

Extension

Students can draw or write the story they created together and turn it into a class picture book.

After the Workshop

Gurril Storm Bird by Trevor Fourmile is based on the rich oral storytelling traditions of Aboriginal peoples, where stories pass on knowledge, values and connections to Country across generations. (<https://www.magabala.com/products/gurril-storm-bird>)

Invite students to reflect on the stories shared by Trevor and Nadine.

Suggested discussion questions:

- What made you laugh?
- What surprised you?
- What did you learn?
- What message do you think the story was sharing?
- How would you retell the story in your own words?

Students will also have created illustrations during the workshop.

If you have any questions, please contact education@qpac.com.au. We are always happy to help.

Extension Activities

- Create freeze frames of favourite moments from the story.
- Research another Dreaming story from a different Nation and compare the themes or lessons.
- Create an artwork inspired by the story and explain its meaning.
- Write or tell an original story inspired by the local environment, considering how stories can teach us about caring for people and places.