Task for *The ABC Book of Australian Poetry*

Worksheet 1

1.1 Photo map of Australia: Poems are about places

There are six parts to this book, dividing the poems into geographical regions controlled by the motif of a river that passes between different geographical regions of Australia:

> All along the river: Beginnings
> All along the river: Mountains, forests and plains
> All along the river: My country
> All along the river: Through the city night and day
> All along the river: To the sea
> All along the river: Horizon and beyond

Organise students into small groups with one of the titles above. Remind them that poems, like any text, come from their context. Ask them:

- What geographical regions are missing in this list? They may want to look at a map and think about this.
- What kinds of places fit under each title? To help them to think, give some examples and ask them to firstly categorise these places under the titles. Some example locations might include: Sydney Harbour, the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru, famous beaches, the outback, the Snowy Mountains, Bondi Beach, Tasmanian rainforests or the Daintree, Glenrowan, shearing sheds, the Dog on the Tuckerbox, Melbourne trams.
- Why would the editor have used the idea of a river to link all these poems?
- Students can collect photos of famous Australian places, landmarks and landscapes that fit into the topic they have been given. Plot them on the map in their location or with string around the map. (This could be constructed as a class activity).

Follow-up discussion with students

- Who has visited some of these places?
- Where's your favourite place in Australia? Why is it your favourite place?
- What do you remember of the sights, sounds and smells of the place?
- What image do you connect with this place?
- What does the place mean for you? Is it a holiday location, a family home, your 'country', a place you spend time with your friends, your quiet place, a beautiful place that took your breath away?
- Then return to your images and change them to match the feeling of the place and not the photographic image: The Gold Coast could become an abstract series of waves, the Sydney Harbour Bridge could become the bright lights of the fireworks or lines of cars, etc. This begins the process of understanding imagery.

1.2 Collage / mind map: Poems are about choices

Have students construct a collage or mind map to represent all the best things about Australia. Use photos, drawings, words – instruct them to try not to leave any white space.

- **Written justification**: Have students explain what they have included in their collage and why they think this represents the 'best' parts of Australia or Australian culture. They should justify why they included these.
- What didn't make the cut? Ask students to rank the most important in their collage from first to last, and to draw a line under the last thing. They are to then list some things that didn't make the cut.
- **Think-pair-share** Students will find that others in the class had other things on the list. Have them explain why they didn't include these.

Follow-up discussion with students

- What similarities or differences did the class have in their collages or lists?
- Why do you think there were differences? Does this make others wrong?
- Is it okay to have different things on the lists?
- Who should be allowed to decide what goes on the list?
- Do you think people's lists would change as they grew older or if they lived at a different time? What if they were from different cultures?

1.3.1 Research timeline: Poems are about events

It's important for students to understand the context of many of these poems as this will help them understand their meanings and significance. Students construct and annotate a timeline in their books or through websites like Read Write Think.

Students can plot a history of Australia from pre-European contact to the present. Try to include major events (The Dreaming, European contact, Federation, the Gold Rush, World Wars), personalities (Ned Kelly, Charles Kingsford Smith, Eddie Mabo, Cathy Freeman, etc.), technology changes (invention of the automobile, tractor, car, Hills hoist, the Victa lawnmower, the personal computer, the arrival of television).

1.3.2 Research timeline: Poems are written by poets

Students can research poets' lives (Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Thomas Shapcott, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, John Shaw Neilson, Mary Hannay Foot, Dorothea McKellar, Eva Johnson, Bruce Dawe, Kate Llewellyn, Libby Hathorn, R.A. Simpson, Peter Skrzynecki, Peter McFarlane, Les A. Murray, Grace Perry, Rhyll McMaster) and even the publication date of some of the poems they will study:

- "In the Forest" Thomas Shapcott (between 1956 and 1988), p. 35
- from "In Time of Drought" Mary Hannay Foott (ca. 1880s), p. 48
- "Trouble on the Selection" Henry Lawson (ca 1990), p. 52
- "Uluru" Eva Johnson (ca 1950s), p. 68
- from "The Law About Singing Out" Gela Nga-Mirraitja (unknown), p. 74
- "My Country" Dorothea Mackellar (1908), pp. 75 - 77
- "Rainwater Tank" Les A. Murray (ca. 1970), p. 88 - 89
- "Where the Pelican Builds Her Nest" Mary Hannay Foott (1881) pp. 94 - 95
- "Clancy of the Overflow" A.B. (Banjo) Paterson (1889), pp. 106 - 107
- "Andy's Gone with Cattle" Henry Lawson (1888), pp. 108 - 109
- "Face of the City" Grace Perry (ca 1960), p. 120
- "Profile of My Father" Rhyll McMaster (ca. 1990), pp. 124 - 125
- 'Peacocks' Kate Llewellyn (1990), pp. 138 - 139
- "Diver" R.A. Simpson (1972), p. 153
- "The Rock Pool" Peter Skryznecki (1983), pp. 154 - 155
- "Dolphins" Peter McFarlane (ca. 1970), pp. 158 - 159

1.3.3 Biography poster

In groups, students choose one of the above poets and research their lives. They might like to include information about when and where they were born, their early childhood, education, and work as a poet. They should focus on locating the things that influenced them, the time in which they lived and the topics they wrote on (This will be easier for some of the poets and the help of a teacher may be needed in some cases).

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