

## Task for *Us Mob Walawurru*

### Classroom Ideas

- Chapter 1 introduces the reader to Ruby and her home at Dry River Station in Central Australia. Her voice is instantly arresting, drawing the reader into the narrative with her frankness and honesty. Discuss the importance of such a voice in narrative. How have the authors successfully achieved this objective?
- Discuss the language choices used to establish the desert setting such as 'Aunty Alice's cry shattered the desert silence' and 'A chorus of camp dogs broke into wild response – the blackfella's alarm clock' (p. 1). How does this description immediately grab the reader's attention?
- What role does Mr Duncan play in the novel? Why does he refer to the camp dogs as 'guardians of the familiar' (p. 3)? What does he mean by this? How is this motif woven throughout *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- Why is the school referred to as the silver bullet, even though the students learn outside?
- Why does Aunty Alice's voice trail away when she recalls how angry the parents became when Mr Duncan arrived with his silver bullet? What were the parents afraid would happen? How do we know this?
- What role does Tjilpi play in *Us Mob Walawurru*? How does he help both Ruby and the reader to learn more about Aboriginal culture?
- Reread pages 7 and 8 in which the creation of Walawurru country is explained. Discuss the role that the Dreaming, the ancestors and the songline had in this creation.
- *Us Mob Walawurru* goes to great lengths to emphasise the central place of country to Indigenous culture. As you read the text, keep note of the many ways in which the authors show this, for example, when Tjilpi takes country with him on the bus trip, and when Ruby rubs country all over the bus before they leave. Write an explanation to share the interconnectedness of Aboriginal people to country, identity and culture.
- As Ruby discovers more about whitefella ways, she questions concepts such as ownership. How are blackfella and whitefella views on ownership different? How is the theme of ownership explored throughout *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- How do the Luritja people show respect for country? Give examples from the text to help with your response.
- In what ways are customs for men and women different amongst the Walawurru people? Why does Ruby try not to listen to men's business? What does it mean for men to be initiated and to have 'gone through Law' (p. 16)?
- Explain the relationship that Uncle Archie has with Old Joe Mogren. Why have the authors included this close bond between an Aboriginal man and a white landowner? What comment are they making about the role of respect and reconciliation between black and white people in Australia?
- Why does Ruby have to keep reminding herself to be brave with new things? In what ways is *Us Mob Walawurru* a book about courage?

- How are Aboriginal family structures similar to and different from white family structures? How is the power and importance of the extended family shown in *Us Mob Walawurru*?
- In what ways does Ruby find Mr Duncan odd? Why does she ultimately come to respect and accept him? How do his actions help this to occur? What does this say about the place of mutual respect and understanding in the reconciliation process?
- Give examples of Mr Duncan's growing respect for the Luritja people. How does he come to better understand and appreciate their culture? How would you describe his burgeoning sense of understanding about Aboriginal culture? Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- Why does the community wish to travel to Tulu together? How does the journey from Dry River Station to Tulu reveal to both Mr Duncan and readers the strength and tradition of Walawurru culture? What have you learnt from this journey?
- Ruby says she doesn't understand why Mr Duncan asks the children questions he already knows they know (p. 22). Why does he do this?
- What does Ruby notice is missing on Mr Duncan's map (p. 29)? Why is his map missing such things?
- How does Aunt Alice respectfully teach Mr Duncan how to better connect with the children, for example, when he asks them the direction to Alice Springs?
- Reread the passage on p. 36 in which we learn about country through the actions of Tjilpi. How does the character of Aunt Alice act as a conduit between Tjilpi and the reader?
- Why does Ruby get angry when she learns more about how her people lived before the white people came? What questions does this new knowledge prompt?
- Ruby says, 'It's better to be brave and know it...rather than hide away...because of fear' (p. 40). Reflect on a time in your life when discovering the truth was challenging but necessary.
- How does the text include the impact on Aboriginal people of first contact with white people? Why do the authors go to such lengths to show readers the positive power of intercultural respect?
- After learning about the experiences of the Walawurru mob after coming across the 'monsters', why does Aunt Alice say to Ruby 'Don't forget it but don't speak of it again' (p. 44)?
- Why does Ruby's anger about the mistreatment of Aboriginal people by whitefellas lessen when she thinks about Old Joe and Mr Duncan? Why have the authors included these respectful relationships?
- Why does Aunt Alice worry that the young men will take the 'whitefella's law if it's easy' rather than 'do our law the right way' (p. 50)?
- Why, after the Blitzzen rolled over, did the young men stand there 'like lonely weeping desert oaks, heads hanging low' (p. 55)? In what ways do their ancestors teach the Luritja people lessons about their law?
- How is Alice Springs different from Dry River Station? Show this comparison on a graphic organiser.

- How does the visit to Alice Springs and Tulu help Ruby realise the true meaning of country, especially to those who have left it? How does seeing family and feeling country again help those who are ailing?
- After meeting her family in Tulu, Ruby says that she's 'overcome with feelings' (p. 67). Why does Ruby feel as though she's known these people all her life when she's only just met them?
- Why does Ruby feel the wind in her feathers when she runs on Sports Day? Why does she slow down to let her sister Maisy tie with her for first place?
- How does the death of Titus affect the Luritja people? How is his death acknowledged?
- Why is the book separated into Parts 1 and 2? How are these two sections different?
- What does Uncle Archie teach Ruby about country?
- Why does Uncle Archie give Daniel the new Landrover? What are the consequences of this action? Discuss whether or not you agree with these? Do you think that Uncle would have regretted his decision or not? Discuss.
- Ruby is initially upset at having to leave Dry River Station, but later says that 'the knot of fear in my belly started to disappear and was replaced by a growing warmth' (p. 99). What enabled this to occur?
- In what ways does Aunty Alice support Uncle Archie?
- Using the description of Big Sky Station in Part 2, sketch or paint Ruby's new surroundings.
- How have the authors used Hughie's character to help non-Indigenous readers better understand Aboriginal spirituality? Why does Hughie go to such lengths to explain his view on spirituality to Uncle Archie?
- In what ways does Ruby feel connected to Blue Sky Station? How is this connection enabled?
- When Neena comes into Ruby's life, it allows Ruby to grow yet again. In what ways does Neena become Ruby's new teacher?
- How are Ruby and Neena similar? Why are they able to make such a connection?
- With older students, use Neena's story starting on p. 117 to investigate the displacement and destruction of the Aboriginal people at the hands of white settlers.
- When Neena gives Ruby a writing book of her very own, she says 'My dearest Ruby, your language and culture tell you who you are' (p. 123). In the role of Ruby, write in this book, exploring these sentiments.
- Neena and Ruby use a botany book to make observations about birds and marsupials. Choose one of the animals that they study and make your own sketches and notes about this species.
- How does the passage about the Luritja wiltja and the whitefella cubby house show the differences and similarities between these two cultures? In what ways is this used to show the potential of reconciliation?
- Why does Ruby object to mining? How does the cubby house help to show this type of invasion?
- Why does Neena encourage Ruby to write in English and Luritja? In what ways is Neena empowering both Ruby and her people?

- Discuss Neena's advice to Ruby: 'When there's something really important to do, most times you will see two paths. One path seems easy and the other more difficult. Lots of people take the easy path...Short-cuts never work. They are always dead ends. Always take the harder path, Ruby. You will need strength and wisdom for it but it's the right way, the way to grow. Easy way's no good' (p. 128).
- Why does Ruby feel inclined to laugh at the Referendum declaring Aboriginal people as Australian citizens and therefore 'coming from this country' (p. 138)? How would the 1967 Referendum have changed Ruby's life? How would it have remained the same?
- When Ruby is a wife and mother, Gough Whitlam becomes Prime Minister, introducing the Central Land Council. By 1988, Native Title was established. Conduct further research into these developments in policy. How does Ruby feel about these notions of land ownership?
- Ruby learns from many different people in her life, in particular Aunty Alice, Uncle Archie and later, Neena. How do they help to shape her as a person and as a Luritja woman? What lessons have you learnt from your extended family or mentors? Share with a friend.
- How does Neena encourage Ruby to take an active role in standing up for her people?
- How does the inclusion of the Luritja language embellish the reader's understanding of the importance of language to Aboriginal culture? Why does the use of such language increase as the text progresses? How does this reflect Ruby's coming of age and the audience's appreciation of the Luritja culture?
- In a paragraph, explain the place that Walawurru – the wedge-tailed eagle – plays in the culture of the Luritja.