



## BLACKBOOKS TEACHER NOTES

### THROUGH OLD EYES: POEMS BY UNCLE WES MARNE

PREPARED BY BELINDA HUNTRISS & COURTNEY RUBIE

**OVERVIEW** *Through Old Eyes* is written by proud Bigambul man Uncle Wes Marne AM. Through his anthology, Uncle Wes beautifully weaves the knowledge and stories of his ancestors with the lessons he has learned on his life's journey. Each poem captures Uncle Wes's love for culture, Country and community, inviting readers to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal peoples. *Through Old Eyes* reminds all readers that despite the ongoing effects of colonisation "no one can take our culture from our hands". It is a text for all and for all ages.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** Uncle Wes Marne comes from a long line of storytellers and cultural knowledge-holders. He learnt the art of storytelling and traditional knowledge from his grandfather around the campfire in his early years growing up in the bush. Born in 1922, Uncle Wes spent his early years living a traditional life with his extended family on Bigambul Country, which begins in south west Queensland and continues into northern New South Wales. Through his maternal line, Uncle Wes also has ancestry from Flinders Island in Tasmania.

At the age of nine, the government removed his family from their ancestral homelands, and they were relocated to Deadbird Mission in Ashford, New South Wales. Uncle Wes has led an exceptional life and has had an array of life experiences including becoming a boxer, serving in the Korean War, and working as a drover and labourer.

Uncle Wes and his wife Emma moved to Sydney in the 1960s to seek greater educational opportunities for his children which he was not afforded. Passionate about sharing culture and storytelling, Uncle Wes set up a fire bucket in his backyard and invited families and children from the Aboriginal community to join his family and share stories and culture. He performed his critically acclaimed piece *'Fire Bucket'* at the Sydney Festival and later at the Yirramboi First Nations Arts Festival in Melbourne. Uncle Wes is an integral part of the Greater Sydney Aboriginal community and has been recognised for his extensive achievement in Aboriginal education, community and the justice system. For decades, Uncle Wes has been a community leader, an advocate and champion for Aboriginal youth and families across the Greater Sydney region. He has dedicated his life to sharing culture and stories with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples alike in hope of promoting understanding of Aboriginal history and culture.

## THEMES

- The Dreaming and creation
- Stewardship of the land
- Storytelling and transmission of culture
- Hunting and fishing
- Aboriginal sites of significance
- Artefacts
- Stolen Generations
- Invasion and colonisation
- Family and kinship
- Life on the land
- Interconnectedness and Indigenous world views
- Ancestral knowledge
- Connection to Country – land, waterways and sky
- Native plants and animals
- Australian geography and landscapes
- Aboriginal Lore
- Identity, belonging and disconnection
- Racism and discrimination

## LESSON SUGGESTIONS FOR PRIMARY YEARS 3-6

- Preview the cover of *Through Old Eyes* and make predictions about what the book might be about by examining the pictures and text.
- On a map of Aboriginal Australia locate Bigambul Country and compare its location to the Aboriginal nation your school sits upon. Discuss the diversity of the different Aboriginal nations on the map.
- Map and measure the distance that Uncle Wes travelled from his home in Bigambul Country to Deadbird Mission in Ashford and then to Mount Druitt in Sydney.
- Uncle Wes learnt his culture from his grandfather. Write a short story or poem about something your grandparent or an older person has taught you.
- Explore different styles of poetry and compare their features noting the similarities and differences. Which style is most engaging to you? What do you like about it?
- Uncle Wes often refers to fond memories of growing up on Country. Explore the concept of Country and what that means to Aboriginal peoples. In a yarning circle use adjectives to describe a place that you feel connected to or belong to. Extend upon this by creating an artwork of this place.
- In Uncle Wes's family, and generally in Aboriginal culture, knowledge is passed down through oral storytelling. Find some local Aboriginal Dreaming stories in your area that are culturally appropriate to share with the class. Create a narrative, orally tell the story, or create a media presentation or animation about the story. Discuss the importance of Dreaming stories and what we can learn from them in relation to lore, culture, and Country.
- *Through Old Eyes* details how Aboriginal peoples have cared for the land for tens of thousands of years. As a class brainstorm different ways that Aboriginal peoples care for Country. To extend, individual class members may research and present further detail about a certain aspect of caring for Country fostered by Aboriginal peoples, for example totemic systems, protocols around hunting, or moving with the seasons.
- Sit in a quiet space outdoors and connect with your senses. What can you hear? What can you feel? What can you smell? What can you see? In this context, discuss the interconnectedness that Aboriginal peoples have with all aspects of Country, from the earth to the sky and everything in between. Explore the

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concept '*the land owns us*'.

- Create a musical piece using a variety of instruments and objects to represent the sounds of the bush.
- Uncle Wes often refers to feeling most connected in the bush. Imagine you are a person living on the land. What does that mean? What kinds of activities would you participate in? Create a narrative or a poem of a day in the life of a person living on the land.
- Liaise with your local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) to plan a trip or invite a local Aboriginal community member into the classroom to talk about an important local site to Aboriginal peoples. What is significant about it? How can we protect it? Why is important for all Australians and especially for Aboriginal peoples?
- Identify artefacts spoken about in *Through Old Eyes*, such as a coolamon, boomerang and woomera. Source a range of artefacts and in small groups touch and feel them, discuss, and predict what they are made from and sketch them.
- As a class, refer to *Through Old Eyes* to describe how Bigambul Country looked when Uncle Wes was a child growing up there, and research further to find out what it looks like today. What has changed? Has it been positive or negative? What has influenced this change? Create a narrative or an artwork to represent how the landscape was in Uncle Wes's childhood in comparison to today.
- Discuss identity as a concept and particularly in relation to Aboriginal peoples. How has colonisation changed the identity of Aboriginal peoples? How can culture be revitalised?

## LESSON SUGGESTIONS FOR SECONDARY YEARS 7-10

- Uncle Wes identifies as a proud Bigambul man. Using the AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia locate Bigambul Country. Now, identify the Country your school sits upon. Using the internet, research and identify the geographic features of Bigambul Country. Make note of any geographic features not on your list as you read through the poems.
- Examine the front cover of *Through Old Eyes*. What do you see on the front cover? Who may the person be? What do you think the poems will be about? Before reading any poems, predict what Uncle Wes has seen through his 'old eyes'.
- What does Country mean to Aboriginal peoples? Create a mind map noting all the things that make up Country. For example, people, animals, plants, waterways, the sky, special sites. Discuss what is meant by "To watch over this land is his duty", in 'Coal Dreaming'.
- Explore the various ways in which Aboriginal peoples care for Country. Using examples from the poems, discuss why a connection to Country is important to Aboriginal peoples.
- What comments does Uncle Wes make about how non-Aboriginal peoples have treated Country? Use examples to support your ideas. Discuss ways non-Aboriginal peoples can also care for Country.
- The poems from 'Campfire Dreaming' take place around a fire. Draw a picture or create a storyboard of the scenes Uncle Wes describes through his poems.
- In 'My Place', Uncle Wes yearns for the old ways. What are the old ways? Why has Uncle Wes referred to the old ways as the "easy life"? Compare Uncle Wes's younger life to what life is generally like for young people now.
- In 'Day', the reader's senses are engaged. What does the reader hear, see and feel when reading the poem? Using a place that is special to you as inspiration, write your own poem or short story that engages the senses.
- Throughout 'Indigenous Ones', we learn of different Aboriginal tools, weapons and technologies. Using the internet, research the purpose of the different artefacts and technologies referred to in the poems. Yarn with your local community about the tools, weapons and technologies used by Aboriginal peoples in your area.
- Using examples from 'The Road', discuss the racism and discrimination Uncle Wes has experienced. In what ways do Aboriginal peoples experience racism and discrimination still today?

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- According to Uncle Wes, how does colonisation still affect Aboriginal peoples today? Refer to the poems from 'Payment to Come' to support your ideas.
- Why do Aboriginal peoples call January 26 Invasion Day? Explain how the actions of the British were an invasion on Aboriginal peoples and their lands.
- What does home mean to you? Where is your home? Where is home for Uncle Wes? How do you know this? Use examples from the text to support your ideas.
- Uncle Wes often refers to Creator Spirits who have given life to the land. What do you know about Aboriginal Creator Spirits? Source a range of Dreaming stories from your local area that tell how the land was given life.
- Aboriginal peoples use storytelling as a way to talk about the past. In what ways are Uncle Wes's poems stories about his life experiences and memories? Use quotes from a range of poems to support your ideas.
- *Through Old Eyes* is told in five parts: 'Campfire Dreaming', 'My Place', 'Indigenous Ones', 'The Road', 'Payment to Come'. Consider why the text has been structured in parts. Discuss the effect of the text's structure on the reader.
- Throughout *Through Old Eyes*, Uncle Wes takes us on a journey as he details his life experiences. Through the poems we begin to understand how much society has changed. What are the changes Uncle Wes refers to?
- Uncle Wes has lived through a time where many different government policies affected Aboriginal peoples. Research the government policies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that impacted the lives of Aboriginal peoples. Using the information gathered from your research, create a timeline of these policies.
- Which is your favourite poem in *Through Old Eyes*? How has this poem impacted you? Analyse the poetic devices used in this poem.
- Who is the audience for *Through Old Eyes*? How do you know this? Use examples to support your response.
- What lessons do we learn by reading *Through Old Eyes*?
- Write a reflection sharing how you felt after reading *Through Old Eyes*. Explain why you feel this way. Discuss what you learnt about Aboriginal peoples and their beliefs, customs and knowledge by reading the poems.

# LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

The primary and secondary classroom activities draw on the Australian Curriculum's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories cross-curriculum priorities of Country/Place, Culture and People for:

## ENGLISH

### YEAR 3

- Language: Text structure and organisation  
[AC9E3LA03](#)
- Language for expressing and developing ideas  
[AC9E3LA06](#)
- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E3LE01](#)

### YEAR 4

- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E4LE01](#)
- Creating literature  
[AC9E4LE05](#)
- Literacy: Creating texts  
[AC9E4LY06](#)

### YEAR 5

- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E5LE01](#)
- Literature: Engaging with and responding to literature  
[AC9E5LE02](#)
- Creating literature  
[AC9E5LE05](#)
- Literacy: Creating texts  
[AC9E5LY06](#)

### YEAR 6

- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E6LE01](#)
- Creating literature  
[AC9E6LE05](#)
- Literacy: Texts in context  
[AC9E6LY01](#)

### YEAR 7

- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E7LE01](#)
- Examining literature  
[AC9E7LE06](#)
- Literacy: Analysing interpreting and evaluating  
[AC9E7LY03](#)

### YEAR 8

- Language: Language for interacting with others  
[AC9E8LA01](#)
- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E8LE01](#)
- Examining literature  
[AC9E8LE05](#)
- Literacy: Texts in context  
[AC9E8LY01](#)
- Word knowledge  
[AC9E8LY08](#)

## YEAR 9

- Language: Language for interacting with others  
[AC9E9LA01](#)
- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E9LE01](#)

## YEAR 10

- Literature: Literature and contexts  
[AC9E10LE01](#)
- Literacy: Texts in context  
[AC9E10LY01](#)

# HISTORY

## YEAR 3

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS3K01](#)

## YEAR 4

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS4K01](#)  
[AC9HS4K04](#)

## YEAR 5

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS5K02](#)

## YEAR 7

- Deep time history of Australia  
[AC9HH7K03](#)  
[AC9HH7K06](#)

## YEAR 9

- Making and transforming the Australian nation (1750-1914)  
[AC9HH9K03](#)

## YEAR 10

- Building modern Australia  
[AC9HH10K13](#)

# GEOGRAPHY

## YEAR 3

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS3K03](#)  
[AC9HS3K04](#)

## YEAR 4

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS4K06](#)  
[AC9HS4K09](#)

## YEAR 5

- Knowledge and understanding  
[AC9HS5K04](#)

## YEAR 7

- Place and liveability  
[AC9HG7K05](#)  
[AC9HG7K07](#)

## YEAR 8

- Landscapes and landforms  
[AC9HG8K03](#)

## YEAR 10

- Environmental change and management  
[AC9HG10K03](#)
- Geographies of human wellbeing  
[AC9HG10K07](#)

# HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

## YEAR 7 & 8

- Identities and change  
[AC9HP8Po2](#)

## YEAR 9 & 10

- Identities and change  
[AC9HP10Po2](#)
- Interacting with others  
[AC9HP10Po4](#)

# MATHEMATICS

## YEAR 6

- Measurement  
[AC9M6Mo1](#)

# SCIENCE

## YEAR 3

- Earth and space sciences  
[AC9S3Uo2](#)

## YEAR 4

- Biological sciences  
[AC9S4Uo1](#)
- Chemical sciences  
[AC9S4Uo4](#)

# THE ARTS – MUSIC

## YEAR 3 & 4

- Creating and making  
[AC9AMU4Co1](#)
- Developing practices and skills  
[AC9AMU4Do1](#)

## YEAR 5 & 6

- Developing practices and skills  
[AC9AMU6Do1](#)
- Creating and making  
[AC9AMU6Co1](#)

## PRODUCED BY

**BELINDA HUNTRISS** is from Worimi Country on the New South Wales mid-north coast and has worked in Aboriginal education for more than ten years. Belinda is an experienced educator who currently works as an Aboriginal Education Consultant in early years education, and as an Aboriginal Education Teacher at Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Tarro. Belinda is working towards a Masters of Indigenous Education and in 2021 was nominated as a finalist in the National Commonwealth Bank Teaching Awards. Belinda says her greatest accomplishment is being a mum to her two sons Wilaaran and Yaarru.

**COURTNEY RUBIE** is a Wiradjuri woman living in Newcastle on Awabakal Country. She is a secondary teacher who has experience teaching HSIE, English, Aboriginal Studies, and Modern History. Courtney currently works as a professional educator consulting on a range of cultural collaboration projects in curriculum development that aim to assist educators with embedding First Nations cultures, histories and languages into teaching and learning. She also works as a First Nations sensitivity reviewer ensuring First Nations peoples and cultures are appropriately and authentically represented in published works. Courtney's passion for Aboriginal languages in education is the inspiration for her current pursuits in learning Wiradjuri language.

## ABOUT BLACKBOOKS

**BLACKBOOKS®** was originally established in 1982 by Kevin Cook and Tranby staff and volunteers as a division of Cooperative for Aborigines Ltd. and went into abeyance in the 1990s.

**BLACKBOOKS®** is currently working to establish itself across the Australian (Global) literary and publishing supply chain through a series of strategic interventions aimed at creating an eco-system of authority and expertise led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, content creators, cultural producers and community led development organisations.

### OUR MISSION

Sharing Stories Telling Truths.

### OUR VISION

An educated and informed Australia and Global Community that acknowledges, values and respects First Nations Australia peoples, cultures, languages, and stories.

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