

BUSH SECRETS

TJALAMINU MIA AND JESSICA LISTER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SALLY MORGAN AND TRACEY GIBBS

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THEMES: Indigenous, Family and Home Stories, Adventure, Multicultural, Environment

YEAR LEVEL: Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: OI.Indigenous

ABOUT THE BOOK

Debbie has two special secrets, and she definitely doesn't want to share them with her brother Billy. When her grandfather comes to visit though, Debbie knows she can trust him with her treasures. And Grandpa has another secret, just for her. It's his special place and Debbie is charged with taking care of it, too.

Bush Secrets is told in the first person, from the point of view of Debbie, a young girl. Broken into short chapters, the writing pulls the reader through the book with gentle descriptions and lively dialogue.

Bush Secrets is about family relationships and passing on the knowledge needed to help protect our environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tjalaminu is a Nyungar woman with bloodline links to the Minang and Goreng peoples of the South-West of Western Australia. She works as a research fellow in oral history and the arts in the School of Indigenous Studies at The University of Western Australia. Jessica Lister was born in 1992 and is one of the Nyungar people from the Katanning area of Western Australia. She likes drawing and listening to music. Her favourite places are the bush in the Perth hills, the beach and the town of Albany. Jessica is Tjalaminu's granddaughter.

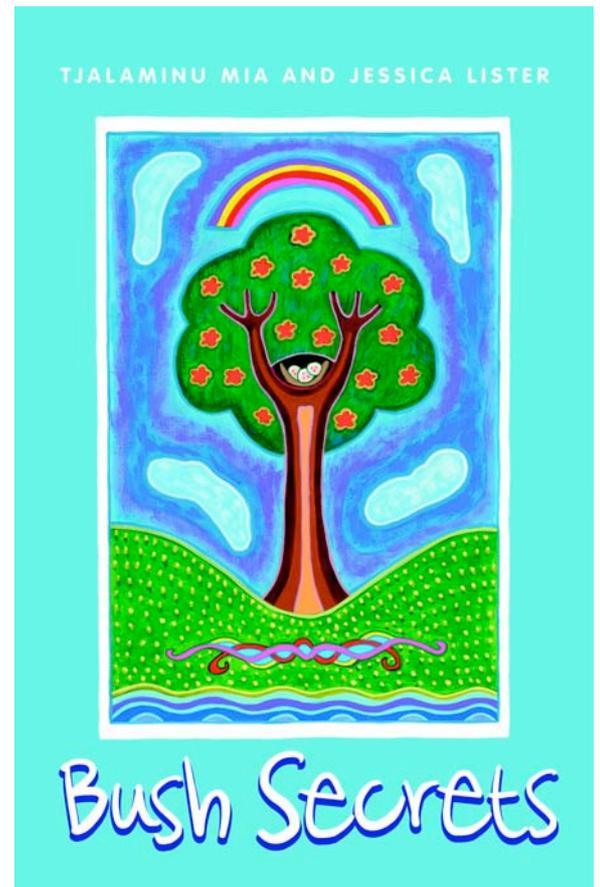
Tjalaminu: 'When I was young, I loved the stories my grandfather told me about our culture, especially the stories about the birds and the Emu man. My story, *Bush Secrets*, was inspired by the wonderful and exciting things he showed me that grew and lived in the bush when I was a little girl.'

Jessica: 'I really enjoyed writing this story with my grandmother. It was inspired by the stories of her life on the farm, and all the great things her grandfather showed her. Nan has also talked to me about the special times when she was growing up, which were real *mooditj* – good!'

STUDY NOTES

Pre-reading

Look at the book and think about the impression it gives you before reading.



- Based on the title alone, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Based on the cover illustration and the title, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Are your answers to questions 1 and 2 different? Why?
- Write, draw or tell your own story, *Bush Secrets*, using just the title and cover illustration as your start point.
- Read the back cover blurb. Does this change your ideas about the book?
- Does the blurb make you want to read the book? Why/ why not?

After Reading

Structure and presentation:

After reading the story, look again at the cover illustration.

- Which elements of the story are illustrated on the cover? Why do you think the illustrator chose to paint those elements?
- Write an alternative blurb for the story.
- How important are the internal illustrations to your understanding of the story? Draw your own pictures (not necessarily based on those in the book) of Debbie, Dada Keen, Billy, Mum, the tree Gorgemas or the rainbow flowers.
- This is a short chapter book. Why do you think the story is divided into chapters? How do the chapters generally begin and end?

Family:

Debbie has several different generations of family in her life – we read about her brother, mother, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

- How similar or dissimilar is Debbie's family to yours?
- Debbie has a special relationship with her grandfather. Do you have grandparents? If so what are/were your favourite activities with them? Write about one of your grandparents – if you didn't know them write about another adult in your family. Why are grandparents different to parents? Has your grandfather or grandmother taught you/ showed you anything special?
- Do you have any brothers or sisters? What are they like? Find a partner and tell each other about your Siblings or another relative of a similar age. Describe their physical attributes, their personality, and their hobbies.
- Chose one of your siblings, or a different family member, and write up two lists about them: draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper and at the top of each column write 'Similar' and 'Different'. On one side write a list of the things that are the same about you and that person, and a list of the things that are different about you and that person.
- Debbie and Billy argue with each other and play together too. Do you fight with your siblings at all? Why does this happen? Are they older or younger? Do you play more or fight more?

Secrets:

There are quite a few secrets in this story.

- List as many secrets from the story as you can remember.
- Why does Debbie keep her two secrets from everybody, especially Billy?
- How long has Dada Keen kept his secret? Who else has he told? Why has he kept it a secret?
- What does it mean to keep a secret?
- Think of something that you have kept a secret in the past. What was it? (You can think this to yourself without telling anyone if it is still a secret.) Why did you keep it a secret? Was it a good thing to keep secret?
- Who do you share secrets with?
- Have you ever told someone a secret, and then found they'd told other people? How did that make you feel? Did it change the way you feel about sharing secrets?
- Has anybody ever asked you to keep a secret? Was it hard? Did you tell it, or keep it? Why is it usually important to keep a secret if someone asks you to?
- What kind of things shouldn't be kept secret?

Special places:

- Debbie has a special place. So does Dada Keen. Do you? Is your special place a secret or do you share it with others? Does your special place have a name?
- Chose a place in your school grounds or classroom that you really like. Describe why you chose the place. Make up a name for your place. Draw a map of your classroom or school and mark your special place on it.

City and country:

Dada Keen comes to visit from the city, where the rest of Debbie's family live. He used to live in the bush, just as Debbie now lives in the country with her family.

- Do you live in the city or the country? Have you always?
- Write down some things you find in the city but not in the country, and vice versa.
- Write a list of good and bad things about the city. Write a list of good and bad things about the country.
- If you live in the city do you think you would like to live on a farm? Why/ why not?
- If you live in the bush do you think you would like to live in a city? Why/ why not?

Flora:

The high point in the story occurs when Dada Keen takes Debbie to his secret place. There she sees a whole carpet of wild vines, with many different flowers.

- What are some of your favourite flowers or plants? Where and when have you seen them?
- Describe your home garden and the plants in it. Draw a map of your garden.
- Pick a flower or an interesting leaf from the school garden, or bring something from home. [Important: remember to ask permission from whoever grew the plant before you pick a flower or leaf!]
- Draw or paint the piece you have chosen. Write a list of adjectives to describe it.
- How is natural flora in the bush different to growing plants in a garden?
- Have you ever been out into the bush during wildflower season? Research the wildflower season of Western Australia (or your local area).
- Why is it forbidden to pick wildflowers in the bush? What would happen if everybody came and picked the flowers? [A: There would be none left.]

Environment:

This story tells us of the importance of protecting the environment. This doesn't always mean keeping places secret, but it does mean we should be careful with the plants and animals around us.

- Describe the land around the place where you live or go to school. What is the soil like? Which kinds of plants grow there – are there tall, strong trees or low bushes? What are the flowers like? How many of the plants in your area are native, and how many are imported? Find out what it means for a plant/animal to be native or imported. Where does the natural water supply come from – is it dry or wet country? How would you describe the seasons?
- What sort of environmental dangers are an issue for flora (plant life) today?
- Why is it important to take care of the environment? What can you do to better care for the environment?
- Research issues relating to the environment, such as: reduced habitat; water resources; the impact of climactic extremes; pollution; endangered species; types of native vegetation and animal species.
- Debbie describes herself as a Nyungar girl who lives in green country. What does that mean to you? Locate the Nyungar region on a map of Australia. Find out about the Nyungar people.
- Many Australians recognise four seasons – summer (December to February), autumn (March to May), winter (June to August), spring (September to November). The Nyungar people recognise six seasons – Birak (December to January); Bunuru (February to March); Djeran (April to May); Makuru (June to July); Djilba (August to September); Kambarang (October to December). Why might the seasons be divided differently by different cultures? Research the Nyungar seasons. For a good place to start go to: <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/apac/lessons/pdfs/apac115.pdf>
- Do all Aboriginal people recognise the same seasons? Investigate the traditional seasons of your local area.

Indigenous Story-telling:

- Are Indigenous stories different to other kinds of stories you've read? In what ways are they different? In what ways are they similar?

- Invite a local Indigenous spokesperson to come and talk to the class about their people's storytelling and culture.
- Arrange for a language lesson in the Indigenous language of your local area.

Resources:

There are substantial resources for exploring Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum available at:

- <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/apac/lessons/index.html> [extensive resource for lesson plans on a variety of topics]
- <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/crosscurriculum/aboriginal/index.htm> [NSW resources to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into classroom]
- <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/> [Queensland resources for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives]
- <http://wwwfp.education.tas.gov.au/English/abtorres.htm> [Tasmanian resource for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives into English teaching]
- <http://www.aboriginaleducation.sa.edu.au/pages/Educators/> [South Australian resources for incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum]
- <http://www.brighthub.com/education/special/articles/45615.aspx> [Review and Lesson Plan for *Bush Secrets*]

