

Books

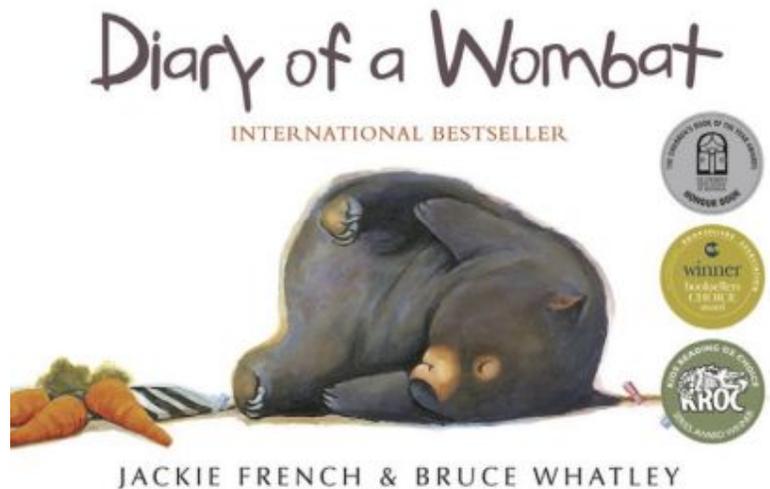
November 02, 2021

Diary of a Wombat **Jackie French and Bruce Whatley Clarion Books, 2009**

This multi-award-winning book has some wonderfully funny photos that offer a perfect complement to the succinct, humorous text. It will certainly direct children to fall in love with wombats, capturing beautifully the image we have of the wombat as a pedestrian, lazy and a little bit greedy — albeit cuddly — animal. Kids will not be disappointed with this book and will be happy to read it again for a bit of a laugh.

Maybe ... **Chris Haughton Walker Books, 2021**

Staying with the theme of children's books focusing on our animal friends, the central characters of Maybe ... are three young monkeys left to their own devices by their mother. Perhaps a bit of a play on the "three wise monkeys", the monkeys defiantly do what mum tells them not to do! It's perfectly suitable and relatable to children. The illustrations follow a unique style and colour arrangement with a lot of vivid colours. The mischievous monkeys do not necessarily learn from the cautionary tale of the book but maybe the reader will!



Lina Lay teaches at Hunter School of Performing Art

The Boy from the Mish **Gary Lonesborough**

The Boy from the Mish explores 17-yearold Jackson's changing relationships as he tackles racism and his emerging sexuality.

The complexities of these relationships help weave a believable tale of self-discovery and self-worth among the characters.

Set on an Aboriginal mission, the story also delves into the traditions and customs of the local Aboriginal community.

The Boy from the Mish is an excellent read, a refreshingly positive depiction of Aboriginal characters and their community.

Waine Donovan is a Country Organiser

Dictionary to help reinvigorate an Indigenous language

MARGARET VOS RELIEVING EDITOR

“A people’s language is their treasure, and the words of the language represent shared cultural knowledge that has been developed over centuries. A dictionary is a record of the ideas that are important to people, that are important enough to use in everyday talk and to pass onto children.”

This quote from the introduction of *The Dhurga Dictionary and Learner’s Grammar: a South-East Coast NSW Aboriginal language* sums up the importance of this wonderful reference book published in 2020. The revival of the Dhurga language has been made easier by the existence of this high-quality book.

The Yuin people

Dhurga speaking people are part of the Yuin people of the South Coast of NSW.

The Yuin share ancestors who, at the time of the British invasion of 1788, spoke closely related languages such as Dhurga, Dharrawal, Dhaurumba and Djirringanj.

Like many of the Aboriginal languages Australia-wide, the Yuin languages were affected by the terrible effects of colonisation and by subsequent government policies and actions that led to the deliberate, overwhelming pressure on Aboriginal communities to speak only English. This meant a painful loss and, thankfully in some cases, a dormancy of the use of their languages.

Dhurga language classes

The creation of the dictionary was born out of the work to revive the Dhurga language.

In 2000, Kerry Boyenga, an Aboriginal teacher at Broulee Public School, suggested to her principal Jeff Ward that the Dhurga language be taught at the school as a Community Language Other Than English.

According to Waine Donovan, one of the dictionary’s authors and a Federation Country Organiser, this was the start of an 18-year journey to revive their language and to create a dictionary. They believed that if the language was going to be spoken in the communities, there needed to be as accurate a record of the language as there could be.

Five years later, after collaboration with teachers from Vincentia High School, as well as with support of the local Aboriginal communities and the dedicated work of linguist Jutta Besold, the Dhurga Djamanj (“Dhurga talk”) Aboriginal Language Program commenced at Broulee Public School. Ms Boyenga and Mr Donovan taught the classes with strong support from Ms Besold, Mr Ward, the teachers at Broulee and the whole school community.

The Aboriginal language lessons were taught to all students from kindergarten to year 6. The classroom teachers also learned the language so they could consolidate what the children were learning from one week to the next.

Local elders and other Aboriginal community members would often attend some of the lessons to see the progress of the program. Some often recalled sitting with tears in their eyes because they were finally hearing their own language being spoken in public again.

The broader community were provided with regular updates on the program by Patricia Ellis, Waine and Kerry’s eldest sister, through the National Parks and Wildlife Service’s publication *Coastal Custodians*.

The Dictionary

The creation of a companion dictionary was a key goal for the revitalisation of the Dhurga language. The work on it was initiated by Ms Besold, who was undertaking her thesis on the Aboriginal languages of the South Coast of NSW at the time. As stated in the introduction to the dictionary: “It is impossible to rebuild a language without skilled linguists.”

The process to create a practical dictionary that would be easy for Dhurga-speaking people to use was formed through the dedication of senior Dhurga language professional Ms Ellis.

The dictionary is not a complete record of the Dhurga language, because of the effects of the British invasion of 1788.

No Dhurga-speaking person with a deep knowledge of the language had the opportunity to spend years

recording their knowledge of the language. Thankfully, however, linguists over time have recorded information that has helped with the process of the reclamation of the Dhurga language to this day.

Ms Ellis, Ms Boyenga and Mr Donovan, as well as all those who worked with them, should be congratulated for their dedication, hard work and commitment to the creation of a truly authentic and authoritative dictionary, which has helped to reinvigorate the Dhurga language. Theirs was a true labour of love guided by the memory of their grandmother Ursula Connell and their mother Patricia Ellis Snr.

As its title suggests, *The Dhurga Dictionary and Learner's Grammar: a South-East Coast NSW Aboriginal language* is more than just a compilation of words and their meanings. It is a professional look into the syntax and structure of the language as well as a guide to its spelling and pronunciation.

Through using this dictionary, Yuin people will be able to increase their vocabulary, develop confidence in their use of their language and become literate in Dhurga. What a fantastic achievement. This dictionary is a perfect tool to achieve the vision of having the Dhurga language more widely spoken in Dhurga-speaking communities.