

Teacher Notes

Mad Magpie

written and illustrated by Gregg Dreise

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

OVERVIEW

Mad Magpie is the third book in this successful series of morality tales from Gregg Dreise. Inspired by wise sayings and the knowledge of his Elders, Mad Magpie tells the story of Guluu, an angry magpie who is being teased by a gang of butcher birds. The more he is teased, the angrier he becomes. When Guluu seeks advice, his Elders tell him to stay calm like the river, ignore the butcher birds and to be strong on the inside. Guluu tries this, but the cheeky birds just laugh at him.

One day, when Guluu is at the river looking for worms, the butcher birds arrive and steal his food. He remembers the words of his Elders and he tries again – and this time Guluu has a different outcome. He stands proudly at the riverbank and remembers how he used to sing when he was having a bad day. Guluu sings so loud he cannot hear the birds laughing at him and they eventually give up and fly away. From that time on, the animals learnt to use music to create a happy mood and they worked together to stop bullying.

- Beautiful vibrant illustrations
- An Australian morality tale featuring bush animals
- A fictionalised story set within the cultural contexts of the Dreamtime
- In the same vein as *Silly Birds* (Speech Pathology Australia Indigenous Book of the Year 2015) and *Kookoo Kookaburra*
- Story looks at ways to deal with teasing and bullying behaviour
- Teacher's notes linked to the Australian curriculum

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Gregg Dreise was raised in St George in Queensland, and grew up in a family that was passionate about the arts, music and sport. He is a descendant of the Kamilaroi and Yuwalayaay people of south-west Queensland and north-west NSW. He is a gifted storyteller and musician, and he features the didgeridoo in his performances at schools and festivals. Dreise is a teacher in the Noosa hinterland in Queensland.

THEMES

- Anger
- Calmness
- Bullying
- Teasing

- Resilience
- Confidence
- Self-belief
- Indigenous culture – Dreamtime, art, role of Elders, language

AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Mad Magpie is a morality tale suitable for readers in early-mid primary school. Written in third person, past tense and including Gamilaraay language, it addresses important and relevant skills for all children, such as resilience and strategies for handling bullying. The rich illustrations lend themselves beautifully to visual literacy, whilst the extended metaphor of the calmness and strength of the river gives literary depth to the text.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum:

Learning area	Year level
English	Years 1-4

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

CULTURAL NOTES

- Role of Elders
- Reference to the Dreamtime
- Gamilaraay Language
- Artwork

For information about teaching Australian Indigenous content see [Teaching Indigenous content with Magabala Books](#).

CLASSROOM IDEAS

English

- Before reading *Mad Magpie*, use the front cover to predict what the text may be about. Why might the magpie be mad? How can we tell he is angry? What other clues do we get about the book from the cover (for example, the Aboriginal artwork)?
- On the first page opening, the word 'attack!' dominates the left-hand side, while the body language of Guluu dominates the right. Discuss the way in which the illustrations and written text work together to create meaning.
- The text begins, 'Way back before *Once-upon-a-time* time, there was the Dreamtime'. Using a timeline, examine the breadth of Indigenous history in

Australia, going back 60,000-120,000 years before the arrival of the first Europeans. What is the difference between 'Once upon a time' and 'Dreamtime'?

- The reader knows instantly that Guluu is angry and can make connections to their own experiences of magpies swooping during nesting season. Discuss the way in which Dreamtime stories often explain the origins of such elements of nature.
- What role do the Elders play in *Mad Magpie*? What does this tell us about the role of Elders in Indigenous culture?
- Throughout the text, Gregg Dreise has used the traditional language of the Gamilaraay people (for more information see the back end covers). Keep a list of these words and their meanings. Draw your own illustrations of Guluu and the elders in a style similar to that in *Mad Magpie*, labelling the animals with their traditional Gamilaraay names. Display these in the classroom.
- What motivates the butcher birds to keep teasing Guluu? What motivates bullies to persist in picking on certain people? Discuss.
- How is Guluu's anger and aggression towards the butcher birds further contributing to the problem?
- What strategies do the Elders give Guluu to help with his problem? How will these suggestions help him? How could you apply this advice to your own problems?
- In a reflection, share a time that you have felt like Guluu. How did you feel and what made you feel that way? How did you react? What strategies did you use to solve the problem?
- Which character are you most like in *Mad Magpie*? Why?
- The butcher birds act in a group, whereas Guluu is often alone. Which illustrations best highlight this dynamic? Look especially at the circular dot paintings and footprints on the left-hand side of page openings.
- The Elders use the extended metaphor of a river to help teach Guluu how to control his anger and calm himself down. In your own words, explain this metaphor.
- How important is self-talk when trying to overcome a problem? Share a time when you have had to speak to yourself in order to gain control of a situation.
- Why is it important that you learn to be strong on the inside? How can this be achieved?
- Guluu shows great resilience because he doesn't give up and keeps seeking advice from the Elders. They too persist by encouraging Guluu to keep trying. What can you learn from the Elders and Guluu about persistence and resilience?
- When Guluu decides to fly over the water rather than get angry with the butcher birds, things slowly start to improve for him. Why is this the case?
- How important is the illustration in which Guluu sees his reflection in the water to the story? Discuss.
- In order to express himself, Guluu sings. How do you express yourself? What do you do to calm yourself down?

- What is the end result of Guluu's singing? What does he learn from this? How does this help the other animals in the community?
- Discuss the importance of the lesson Guluu learns - that you can 'be alone and stand strong'.
- What are the morals in *Mad Magpie*?
- Retell *Mad Magpie* in your own words, either using a voice recording app or writing it.
- Which is your favourite page opening? Why? Share with a friend.
- *Mad Magpie* was inspired by 'old words' that are printed at the back of the book. Make a poster of these words and use to underpin the positive message of the text.
- In small groups, create your own moralistic tale. Illustrate in a style similar to that of *Mad Magpie*.
- Compare *Mad Magpie* with *Giraffes Can't Dance* by Giles Andreae. How are they similar and different?

Appendix – Links to the Australian Curriculum

Year	English
F	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand that English is one of many languages spoken in Australia and that different languages may be spoken by family, classmates and community (ACELA1426) • Understand that some language in written texts is unlike everyday spoken language (ACELA1431) • Explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories and informative texts (ACELA1786) <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences (ACELT1575) • Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (ACELT1783) • Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a text (ACELT1578)
1	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore different ways of expressing emotions, including verbal, visual, body language and facial expressions (ACELA1787) <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how authors create characters using language and images (ACELT1581) • Discuss characters and events in a range of literary texts and share personal responses to these texts, making connections with students' own experiences (ACELT1582) • Innovate on familiar texts by using similar characters, repetitive patterns or vocabulary (ACELT1832)

2	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify visual representations of characters' actions, reactions, speech and thought processes in narratives, and consider how these images add to or contradict or multiply the meaning of accompanying words (ACELA1469)
3	<p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others (ACELT1596) Create texts that adapt language features and patterns encountered in literary texts, for example characterisation, rhyme, rhythm, mood, music, sound effects and dialogue (ACELT1791)
4	<p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that Standard Australian English is one of many social dialects used in Australia, and that while it originated in England it has been influenced by many other languages (ACELA1487) <p>Literature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)
<p>Cross curriculum priorities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures</p>	
<p>General Capabilities Personal and social capability, Intercultural understanding</p>	