

The Land Down Under  
seen through the eyes of Bunna, a native Australian

Part two

We are back in Australia and Bunna, a native Australian, is guiding our steps through the dusty red outback in the southern part of the Northern Territory.

Straight ahead of us, rising almost vertically out of the desert is Ayers Rock or « Uluru » as the Aborigines call it : one of the natural wonders and a very popular tourist attraction. Uluru is listed as a World Heritage Site and is the most visited site in Australia.

In 1986, the Australian Government returned the ownership of Uluru to the Aboriginal people. Many native Australians regard Uluru as a sacred place. They believe that its rocks are the actual bones of their ancestral heroes of the Dreamtime. Some of its caves are covered with ancient Aboriginal rock paintings executed many thousands of years ago.



Ayers rock at sunrise

As we are drawing closer to Uluru, Bunna is ready to tell us more about the Dreamtime : the time when Aboriginal Australians believe the Earth was shaped and populated.



*We know that many Aboriginal myths are about the universe, the stars, the sky and the earth. They are evidence of the Aborigines' strong environmental involvement. What about the sun ? Bunna, can you tell us about the FIRST sunrise ?*

At the beginning, the sky was so close to the earth that the Aborigines had to live in the darkness and crawl around to collect food. But the magpies decided to work together to raise the sky. They lifted it with long sticks, resting it on boulders of various sizes. As they were doing so, the sky suddenly split open, revealing the beauty of their first sunrise. Overjoyed with the light and the warmth, the magpies burst into their melodious call. From those remote times until now, the magpies have always greeted the sun with their warbling song.





*Bunna, I know that there are various Aboriginal legends about Uluru. One of them claims that it was created by the Lizard-Man. Can you tell us more about it ?*

Alinga, the Lizard-Man, was one of the beings of the Dreamtime. He was a mighty warrior. His favourite weapon was the boomerang. He could throw it so far, it sometimes took days to return. One day, Alinga decided to make a special boomerang.



A boomerang

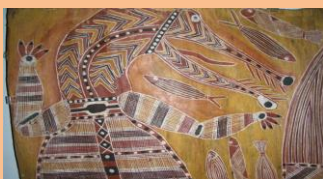


Uluru

At last, his great boomerang was ready. He drew back his arm, and with all his might flung the boomerang high into the sky. It disappeared over the mountains. Alinga waited for it to return. He waited and waited but still there was no sign of the boomerang. Alinga decided to go and look for it. He climbed the mountains and set out across the desert. He journeyed on and on and on. And then, one day, he saw in the distance a red dome, rising out of the flat land. It was shaped like an enormous boomerang.

As he neared it, Alinga saw it was a boomerang but not just *any* boomerang : it was *his* very special boomerang that had crashed into the desert ! He tried to lift it to take it back home but it was too heavy. After many unsuccessful attempts, he decided to live beside it for the rest of his life.

We believe that the lizards now living in the caves at the foot of Uluru are the spiritual descendants of Alinga, the Lizard-Man.



*Bunna, last time you told us about Naradan, a man who was turned into a bat for not respecting the lores of his tribe. Do you have any other myth that is meant to teach tribesmen a lesson ?*

Yes, of course. Let me tell you about Pukawah. He was a skilful hunter but he was vain and foolish. The Great Spirit lost patience with him and turned him into ...a crocodile !

*What had he done to deserve such a harsh punishment ?*

He had fallen in love with a married woman !

*How was he banned from the group ?*

The men of his tribe flung spears at Pukawah as he was sitting by the river bank with the married woman. With a great cry, Pukawah disappeared in the water. Everyone was sure that Pukawah was dead. But they were wrong : he came back a few weeks later !

*Was he punished again ?*

Well, he had lost his human shape ... the spears of the warriors had changed into big scales and Pukawah had turned into a monstrous crocodile, condemned to live in the water for the rest of his life. From that day on, no man from his tribe ever lived peacefully near the river.



As you understand, this myth teaches the Aborigines to watch out for crocodiles as their attacks are fatal ! Still, crocodiles are a great source of food for the Aborigines : they hunt them and take the eggs from their nests.



*Well, before we part again, I'd like to know more about the kangaroo. After all, it is one of Australia's emblematic animals.*

Yes, that's true. Together with the emu, it stands on the coat of arms of Australia. This shield is used to identify Australian government authority and property.



*Australia's coat of arms*

Now, to get back to our Dreamtime heroes, let me tell you how the kangaroo got her pouch.

One morning, when Mother Kangaroo and her baby were feeding in the plains, a weak and very old wombat came crawling towards them. He was sick and blind, hungry and thirsty.

Mother kangaroo felt sorry for him.

She first took him to a waterhole. And the wombat drank and drank and drank. Then, she took him to some lovely grass. And the wombat ate and ate and ate.



A moment later a hunter, carrying a boomerang, came running towards them. His eyes were set on the poor wombat. Mother kangaroo jumped up and down to attract the hunter's attention away from his easy prey. She actually let him chase her away from her baby and the old wombat. The hunter flung his boomerang at her but mother kangaroo kept out of his reach.

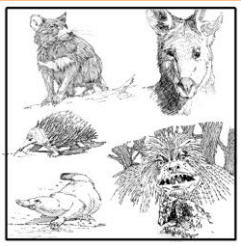
When she finally made it back to where she had left the old wombat and her baby, the wombat was nowhere to be seen.

She did not know the wombat was the Spirit of the Creator who had come down to Earth to thank her for her kindness and gentleness. That night, the Spirit left her a gift : a dilly bag. When Mother Kangaroo woke up, she put the dilly bag around her waist and it turned into a pouch.

It was very convenient : her baby could rest, sleep, keep warm and hide in it.

And the story goes that ever since, kangaroos and other marsupials have been the only animals in the whole world that have pouches.





*Bunna, one last question : what other Australian animals are marsupials ?*

There are quite a lot. The wombat, the koala, the possum, the wallaby, the Tasmanian Devil and the numbat are all marsupials. They are mammals and their young complete their development on the outside of their mother, safely protected by her pouch.



The koala



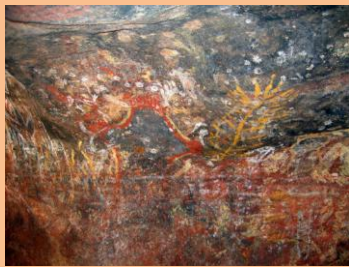
The Tasmanian Devil



The possum



The numbat



*Bunna, I have a special request to make for our next field trip. Since we are about to see the great cave paintings at Uluru, I'd like you to talk to us about Aboriginal art and Aboriginal symbols.*

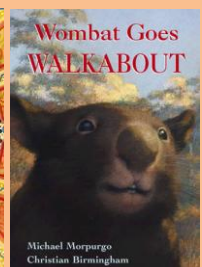
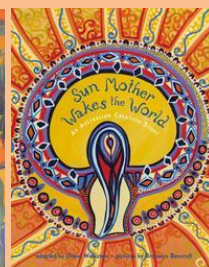
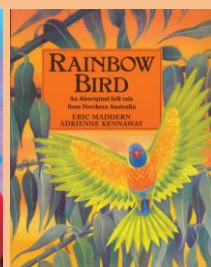
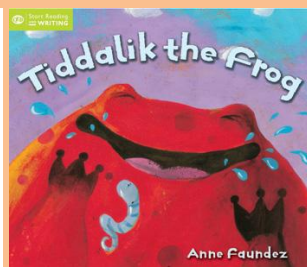
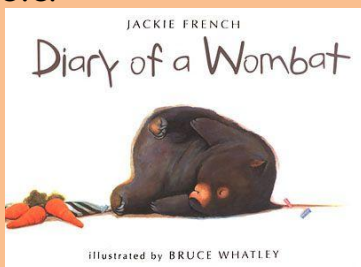
*Aboriginal cave paintings at Uluru*

Well, I'll be glad to show you some of our artistic achievements if they can assure a better understanding of our culture. As you've understood by now, our heroes from the Dreamtime set a good example for down-to-earth wisdom and established values that are still meaningful today.

*To be continued ...*

*If you want to share these wonderful stories with your students, here are some suggestions :*

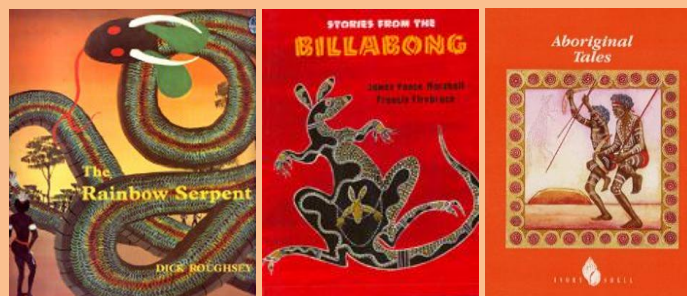
**A1 level :**



- Diary of a Wombat by Jackie French, Ed. HarperCollins
- Wombat Goes Walkabout by Michael Morpurgo, Ed. HarperCollins
- Tiddalik the frog by Anne Faundez, Ed. Qed publishing
- Rainbow Bird, an Aboriginal folk tale from Northern Australia by Eric Maddern, Ed. Frances Lincoln
- Sun Mother Wakes the World, an Australian creation story, by Diane Wolkstein, Ed. HarperCollins

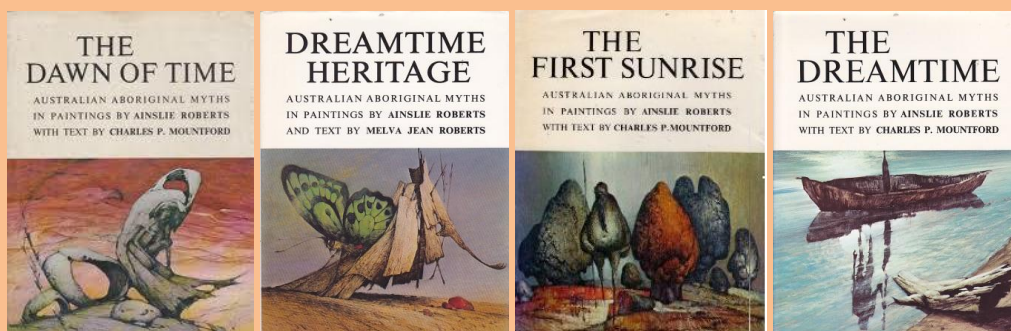


A2 level :



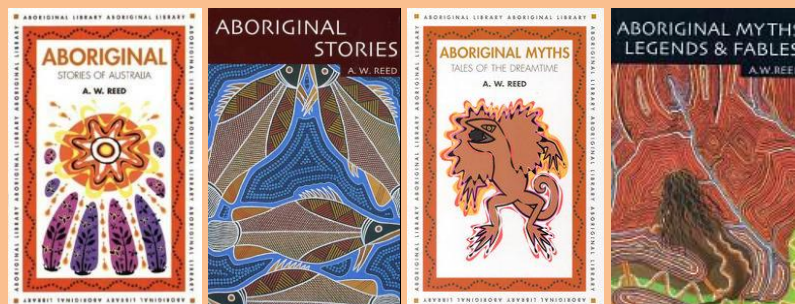
- The Rainbow Serpent by Dick Roughsey, Ed. HarperCollins
- Stories from the Billabong by James Vance Marshall, Ed. Frances Lincoln
- Aboriginal Tales, Classic Children's stories read and performed by Stan Pretty, Ed. Ivory Shell

B1/B2 level :



- The Dawn of Time, Australian Aboriginal Myths by Charles P. Mountford, Ed. Rigby
- Dreamtime Heritage, Australian Aboriginal Myths by Charles P. Mountford, Ed. Rigby
- The First Sunrise, Australian Aboriginal Myths by Melva Jean Roberts, Ed. Rigby
- The Dreamtime, Australian Aboriginal myths by Charles P. Mountford, Ed. Rigby

B2/C1 level :



- Aboriginal Stories of Australia by A.W. Reed, Ed. Reed New Holland
- Aboriginal myths, Tales of the Dreamtime by A.W. Reed, Ed. Reed New Holland