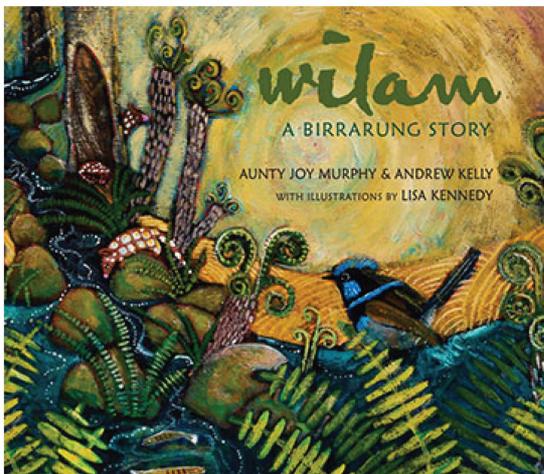


# Wilam: A Birrarung Story

## Exploring the 2020 CBCA Short List: Information Books



### Parts in this unit

- [Field and context](#)
- [Responding and exploring](#)
- [Examining](#)

**Author:** [Aunty Joy Murphy, Andrew Kelly](#) **Illustrator:** [Lisa Kennedy](#)

**Publisher:** [Walker Books](#)

**Themes:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Histories; environment; Yarra River; Australian Aboriginal Heritage and Language; Biodiversity; Ecosystems

**Years:** Australian Curriculum: English, Years 2 and 3; HASS (History), Years 2 and 3; NSW Stage 1 and 2

**From the publisher's synopsis:** In this stunning picture book beautifully given form by Indigenous artist Lisa Kennedy, respected Elder Aunty Joy Murphy and Yarra Riverkeeper Andrew Kelly the story is told of one day in the life of the vital, flourishing Birrarung (Yarra River). *As ngua rises, Bunjil soars over mountain ash, flying higher and higher as the wind warms. Below, Birrarung begins its long winding path down to palem warreen. Wilam – home.* Yarra Riverkeeper Andrew Kelly joins award-winning picture book duo Aunty Joy Murphy and Lisa Kennedy to tell the Indigenous and geographical story of Melbourne's beautiful Yarra River, from its source to its mouth; from its pre-history to the present day. An ode to Australian rivers, the flora and fauna that live on them, and the function they perform as a part of modern day life. *Wilam* brings Aboriginal life, culture and language right in to the heart of the city.

**Unit writer:** [Amanda Worlley](#)

## Field and context

### Building field knowledge

- Determine what students know about rivers in general and the Yarra in particular using a KWL or RAN Chart strategy. Use resources from local or [State Government](#) to help students understand the watercycle and catchment areas.
- Display a map (paper or [digital](#)) and locate the Yarra Ranges National park and trace the Yarra River journey to Melbourne City.
- Create a Woiwurrung language (Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung tribe of the Kulin nation) vocabulary wall to record the words and their meaning as they are encountered in the text and further reading
- Use the interactive [AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia](#) to locate Woiwurrung. You may wish to use the map to locate the Indigenous language of your local area. Connect to your State Library, or your local language and heritage centre, to provide further opportunities for research in your local context.

### Exploring the context of the text

- Introduce the Woiwurrung language word *Birrarung* and its meaning *river of mists*, often called the Yarra.
- Show how this word is used by the Victoria State Government to [name the group that](#) are the independent voice of the river. Listen to the [ABC Podcast](#) with one of the authors, Andrew Kelly, who is the Yarra Riverkeeper. His role is to speak for the Yarra on behalf of the community.
- Watch the short [news report](#) from January 2020 when the local government, state government, working with traditional owners have agreed to a plan to protect the river, which provides images of the river, some historical, and an infographic showing the rivers journey on a map. [ACHASSK045 HT1-2](#)
- Introduce the word *traditional owners* and explore its meaning with students. Add this to a vocabulary word wall to record new and interesting words as they encountered in the text and extended reading. [ACELA1475](#)

## Responding and exploring

### Responding to the text

- Discuss the importance of stories from local language groups to provide connection to the land they belong to. [ACHASSK049 HT2-2](#)
- Show the front and back cover to the students and ask them to predict what type of text this is (narrative/informative) and what they think Wilam and Birrarung might be or mean. Do they think it might be a dreaming story? Why/why not? Examine the end papers, does this give them any further clues or change their opinion? Stop at the first page of the story to study the double page. Do the illustrations suggest a dreamtime story? Read the text. Are there clues here that lets us know that this is in the present? (distant city, and image of city) [ACELT1587](#) [ACELT1594](#) [EN1-11D](#) [EN2-10C](#)
- Read the text first time through enjoying the local language words, without stopping to try to identify using images or the glossary. On subsequent readings invite students to use clues in the text and images to help them decode and record the meanings of these words on the Woiwurrung language vocabulary wall. [ACELY1669](#) [ACELY1679](#) [EN1-4A](#) [EN2-4A](#)

### Creating texts

- As part of your geography studies, choose a river/creek in your local area. Use Google Maps satellite or Google Earth to display. Identify key areas along the path of the river. Provide students with a range of scanned images. Your local library may have historical image collections that you can access. Students can use PowerPoint, or a preferred digital story telling software or app, to arrange images and create a sound track about a day in the life of the local river or waterway. Encourage students to add sound effects to match. [ACELT1791](#) [EN2-2A](#)

- The text is rich with illustrations of animals along the river. Have students choose an animal from the text and write short diary entry from the point of view of the animal. Encourage them to use their five senses and describe what they saw, felt, smelt, heard and tasted. [ACELT1833 EN2-2A](#)

## Examining

### Examining text structure and organisation

- Gather a selection of traditional information texts on a similar topic. Identify the features of traditional information texts such as chapters, sub headings, glossary, index. Point out the glossary and discuss how this is an information text presented in a narrative structure. The story covers one day in the life of Birrarung as we travel from the small creeks that join to become Birrarung, right through to the bay. Use a subsequent reading of the text to identify and record facts about Australian animals (platypus hatch young, wombat backward facing pouch) that we can glean from the text. [ACELA1463 EN1-7B](#)

### Examining grammar

- An interesting feature to study with students is the omission of the word *the* before the Woiwurrung words because that language does not use the definite article *the*. It also does not use plurals as frequently as in English and sometimes double the word instead (See publisher teacher notes in additional resources which describe the text as taking on a mythical quality). Rewrite the opening paragraph using the English word to substitute using the same grammatical process. *As sun rises, turning clouds over the distant city red, wedge-tailed eagle soars over mountain ash, flying higher and higher as the wind warms. Below, Yarra begins its long winding path down to bay.* How does this sound compared to the original text? Discuss the mythical quality and the language choices of the authors to achieve this. How does this sound when we include the word *the* before the nouns of sun, wedge-tailed eagle, Yarra and bay. [ACELT1591 ACELT1599 EN1-7B EN2-8B](#)

### Examining visual and multimodal features

- The illustrator uses dots to represent the steams, creeks and river, particularly in the beginning of the text. What do the dots remind us of? How does this connect us to the Indigenous context? [ACELA1469 ACELA1483 EN1-4A EN2-8B](#)
- The text is a rich, multilayered feast of colour that combines Aboriginal art style (dots, lines, repetitive patterns) mixed with more naturalistic art work. Choose a double page spread and have students identify these different styles. What does the illustrator do to make us feel like we are travelling along the river? [ACELA1469 ACELA1483 EN1-4A EN2-8B](#)
- The text also provides layers of information in the images. Choose a double page spread and read the words. They have students examine the illustrations. What additional information is the illustrator giving us that is not in the text about life at that particular point of the river? [ACELA1469 ACELA1483 EN1-4A EN2-8B](#)

**Additional and related resources and links to other texts:** For an authoritative source access the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies page on [Living Languages](#). View [video of a Boon Wurrung country story](#) about eels in the Yarra. [Publisher's teacher notes](#) (.pdf 3MB) provides a lot of background information and additional activities. Visit your State or Local Government resources on water wise education, [Qld Government](#). Explore Work from Indigenous Authors in PETAA units [Welcome to My Country, Our Birds: Njilimurrungu Wäyin Malanyha](#), and [Young Dark Emu: A Truer History](#).

[Exploring the 2020 CBCA Short List main page](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#)