

MARCH 2020 Teachers' Notes & Activities

AZARIA

A TRUE HISTORY

Written and illustrated by Maree Coote

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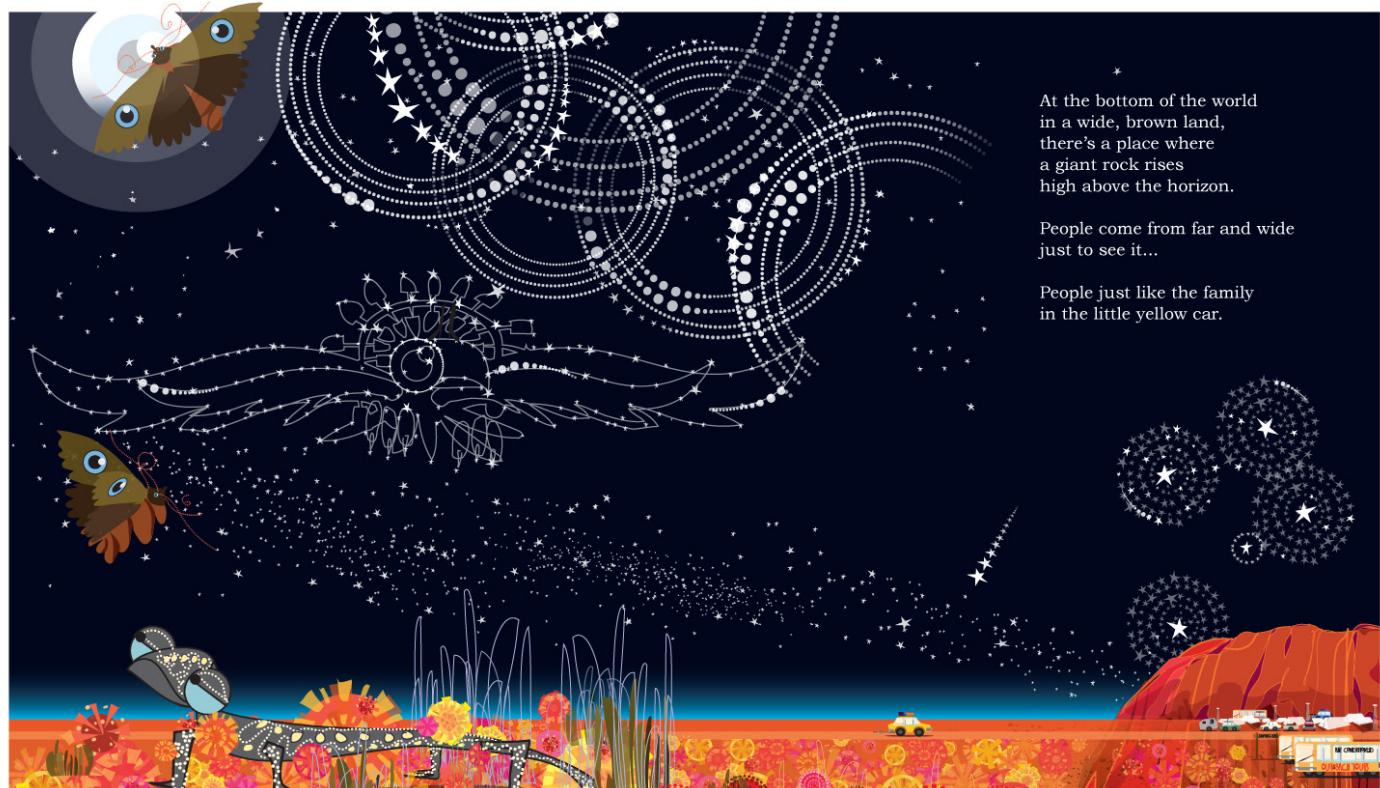
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE TRUTH GETS LOST?

Where wild animals and people meet, tragedy can strike. But when a tiny baby is stolen by a dingo, people simply cannot accept such a thing. Prejudice and gossip grip the nation, and the tragedy transforms into a fight for the truth. This is a true Australian story of innocence, ignorance, and the perils of 'mob thinking'.

1. SYNOPSIS

A family is enjoying a camping holiday in the Australian outback wilderness when a dingo creeps into their tent, steals a tiny baby, and vanishes into the night. The reader witnesses the action and knows the truth, but as the story unfolds, the reader witnesses a second tragedy, as a terrible mistake is made.

Refusing to accept the dingo as the culprit, the authorities accuse the mother of killing her own baby. She is bullied and accused by everyone, and—despite her long fight for the truth—eventually she is sent to prison. It is a great injustice. After many years, new evidence is uncovered that proves the mother's story is true, and the mother is finally proven innocent. She chooses to forgive those who accused her and never to forget the lessons this story offers us: Not to be ignorant of the dangers around us, and not to be ignorant in our judgment of each other, for things are not always as they seem.



At the bottom of the world
in a wide, brown land,
there's a place where
a giant rock rises
high above the horizon.

People come from far and wide
just to see it...

People just like the family
in the little yellow car.

2. INTRODUCTION

'Azaria' has the hallmarks of a fairy tale, echoing the idea of the big, bad wolf. But is in fact a true story of a remarkable Australian event when a dingo took a baby from a camping ground at what was then called Ayers Rock National Park (now Uluru) in 1980. Having little awareness of the dingo as a skilled hunter, the authorities — and the nation— rejected dingo attack as an explanation and instead accused the mother of killing her own baby.

A 'perfect storm' of ignorance, media sensationalism, bad science and poor policing combined to blame and convict the mother. She was defenceless in a frenzy of public and media bigotry, of vested interests and of powerful legal forces. She was jailed for several years and not exonerated until 32 years later. The story is a classic example of a miscarriage of justice.



3. THEMES/CONCEPTS

- Justice:** Fairness & justice / Unfairness & injustice
- Ignorance:** Of environment / of wildlife / of the 'Other'
- Nature/Environment:** Environmental care / wildlife care / Tourism and habitat management / Dingoes / Safety
- Old v New:** Ancient places/ New civilisation; Old instincts/New babe; Ancient wisdom/ Modern behaviour
- Awareness:** Urban people / Outback places ; Modern city-dweller / Indigenous awareness / Pioneer awareness
- Prejudice/ Bullying/ Discrimination/** Indigenous knowledge / Indigenous exclusion / Blame culture
- Media:** True story vs Fairy tale / TV entertainment vs News/ Fake news / Media 'pile-on'
- Law:** Rigorousness & standards in Law and Forensic Science / How the Law evolves and improves from real cases
- Grief:** People handle grief in different ways / Resilience
- Australian History:** How is history written/ corrected / maintained / retold in various forms

NOTE: FACTS ON ULURU, ON DINGOES AND ABOUT AZARIA'S CASE CAN BE FOUND ON THE LAST PAGE OF THE BOOK .

4. AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

"This episode in our history has always resonated deeply with me because of its flawed humanity. There was no original evil done here. A dingo is not evil. Although it was the guilty agent here, it is, in fact, as innocent as the baby and the mother. But the humanity at play both before and after this event was driven by ignorance, ego, arrogance, and prejudice. The resulting miscarriage of justice visited upon an already grieving mother is simply heart-breaking.

In actual fact, the entire tragedy was totally avoidable, (perhaps even including the dingo attack) but for the lack of an open mind... in the form of an open ear to the mother, to the Indigenous people, to the eye-witnesses, to pioneer history, to the land, and to nature. The nation was pushed to choose between the dingo or the mother.

I think this story is a defining one for Australia—a turning point in our collective psyche. It is a cautionary tale about how little we understand ourselves as a nation. In our modern lives, we seem to know less about our country and its hazards than did the early pioneers. And we remain ignorant and remote from the valuable knowledge of our Indigenous brothers and sisters. Our lack of common sense about dingoes, sharks and crocodiles is both dangerous and can lead to wrong assumptions.

We were far more ready to suspect people of highly unlikely acts, than suspect wild animals of their natural behaviour. I chose this story because I do not believe the nation has fully confronted it, even now. And today, many Australians' have forgotten this event altogether. I offer it as a cautionary tale, in the hope of a safer, fairer, and wiser Australia."—MAREE COOTE

5. CLASS ACTIVITY

- Show the students the front cover. Ask class what they think this book might be about.
- Do they recognise the name in the title? From where? If the story is not well-known, consider/discuss why not?
- After reading the text, discuss the main message of the book. What is this book really about? (*Safety in the wilderness; racing to judgement; miscarriage of justice. In other words, it is about Ignorance: both of hazards, and of the 'other.'*)
- What is the main event? This event then causes a series of reactions. What are they?
- Who is/are the main protagonist/s of this story? To whom does the action happen?
- Why do you think nobody believed the mother? Can you find any reasons in the book?
- Why do you think people did not want to believe the dingo was at fault? Can you find any reasons in the book?
- This could have happened to anyone. How would you behave in this situation?

-WEB RESEARCH PROJECT: The dingo is the largest land predator in Australia. As the 'apex predator', the dingo is at the top of the food-chain, and plays a critical role within the ecosystem by maintaining the balance of populations of other species and therefore also the balance of native flora. It is instinctively driven to hunt prey everyday. The dingo is resourceful, highly intelligent, flexible, and an expert problem-solver. Can you make a chart showing the animals that are a part of the dingo's food chain, and the flora they eat? (*Inter-relationships of flora and fauna, and predation.*)

-What other Australian animals can you think of that need to be treated with care, respect and caution? (*Crocodile, shark, spider, snake, goanna, jellyfish*). What animals in other countries pose a similar risk? (*Coyote, bobcat, bear etc.*)

6. THE BOOK'S MESSAGE

1. Who do you think will benefit from reading this book? Why?
2. What is more important in your opinion — the words or the pictures?
3. Do you think differently about things after reading the book? Do you think differently about: The desert? The Rock at Uluru? The Indigenous people? Wild animals? The media? The courts and the Law? Public opinion? If so, how have your thoughts and opinions changed? Why?
4. Create a mind map showing all the different events, motivations, people, facts and forces at play in the story.

7. AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM TOPICS

I. ART / VISUAL LITERACY

1. Split the class into groups of three or so, and ask them to look at the opening scene (the first double spread). Notice the colours, the space, and the scale of the elements. Notice how the eye is drawn across the sky and down to the rock scene. How is the mood of the scene created? Notice the scale of representation of large objects and the scale of small objects. Notice the encroachment of human activity in the bottom right hand section of the scene. What is different about these shapes and objects? Describe what is happening in the picture. What Themes/ Concepts from the list above can you see represented in the picture? Do any of the images have a symbolic aspect? How does the picture make you feel? Describe the mood of the picture.
2. Look carefully at the illustrations on pages 8 and 9. Have the class describe all the objects and action they can see there. Why are these elements included in this illustration? What is the evidence of the impact by humans in this wilderness area? Describe. (*Signs, litter, bins, cars, buses, tents, campfires, lighting*). What is the illustrator showing us?
4. Look at the illustrations on pages 10-11 of the dingo and the rock. The illustrator is making a comparison. What is this about? Discuss metaphor.
5. Look at pages 24-25. Why did the illustrator use this newspaper device in the story at this stage?
6. Study the courtroom scene on pages 28-29. What elements of interest can you see in the illustration? What groups of people can you identify—what are their roles? Why do you think these people judged the case the way they did? Why did the illustrator draw this scene this way?
7. Did you notice a small animal on page 8? The animal is not mentioned in the text, so why has the illustrator added this character? Can you find the same animal elsewhere into the book? (*Spinifex Hopping Mouse occurs on pages 8,9,15,26,31*). What is the story of this animal in the book? (*See article 1 in newspaper p.24*). On pages 6&7, what other animals are represented? Discuss the 'circle of life'. (*Goanna & moth; eagle & joey; dingo & hopping mouse, p.6-7.*)
8. Can you find examples of 'emotive' illustration? (*Dark landscapes with spot-lit focus; expressive eyes and hands; use of scale; use of dark colour schemes.*) Why do you think the illustrator has included the images in the stars?

II. ENGLISH / LANGUAGE

1. What language features have been used to engage the interest and emotion of the reader? Can you find an example of repetition? Of alliteration? Of metaphor? Can you identify any 'emotive' language?
2. Why does the author mention 'wolves' and 'fairy tales'?
3. Consider: How would the story change if the character names were changed from:
Desert, dingo, mother, baby, ranger, police, scientist, press to:
Forest, wolf, mother, baby, woodsman, king, wizard, townsfolk?
4. This is a true story. If it was a fairy tale, what would you think of it? Is it different to read knowing that it is a true story?
5. **A Change of Focus:** On page 19, the focus shifts to a single character. Discuss the significance of 'what happened next'.

III. HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

-Foundation Level:

Why are some places and events considered 'special', and how do we know? Significance, continuity and change, cause and effect, place and space, interconnections and perspectives and action.

-History

The longevity of the Indigenous Peoples' histories and cultures; First Nations' Knowledge; The development of rights for Aboriginal Peoples; Different perspectives; Australia's identity, heritage and diversity; Indigenous stories about animals. *Also a geological study of natural history from time Uluru was formed (Cambrian era)*.

-Geography

The influence of culture on places; Human alteration of environments; Progress & habitat; Aboriginal Peoples' connection to place; People's perception of places; 'Landforms and landscapes'. *Also: The clash between civilization and nature at wilderness frontiers; The unique geography of Uluru.*

-Civics and Citizenship

How groups in society perceive each other and relate to each other; Justice and the law; The importance of an active and informed citizenship; Exploring different perceptions of people, places, ideas and events; The importance of ethical considerations and being informed when making decisions; The processes for decision-making and the implications of decisions that are made for individuals, society, the economy and the environment; What different perspectives are there about national identity?; The Anangu peoples of ULURU region; *Also the cultural importance of Uluru.*

8. DISCUSSIONS:

1. Can you think of any fairy-tale figures that people have shunned? (The Beast from *Beauty and the Beast*; Quasimodo from *Hunchback of Notre Dame*). What is the reason people didn't like them? (Discrimination=Unfavourable treatment based on a particular attribute).
2. Can you think of any real life contemporary figures who have been the victim of mob-thinking, bullying or 'shunning' by the public or by the media? (e.g *Lady Diana*, *Meghan Markle*, *Adam Goodes*).
3. Have you ever been accused of something you didn't do? How did that make you feel?
- 3a. Have you ever been gossiped about/ bullied? How did that make you feel?
4. Can you invent a character of your own, one that is a good-hearted character, but with some kind of feature or event that leads to the character being shunned by their friends. Create a short story about this. Discuss empathy,
4. Media: *Azaria* is a true story, and it occurred at a time before social media. How would this play out in the social media platforms of today? (*Social media and public opinion*)
5. Law: Because of Azaria's case, the Law has been changed to accommodate an Independent science (Forensic) division. Also, because of this case, the Law has been changed to improve on the problematic default 'Open Finding' in cases of wild animal attack. Discuss how real life cases actually change the Law.
6. There have been at least 16 more dingo attacks (three fatal) from 1980 to 2019. Why do you think people remain unaware of this problem? What would you do to improve safety at camping grounds?

9. COMPARISON TEXTS

Compare and contrast this story with other stories of miscarriages of justice:

"*To Kill A Mockingbird*" Novel by Harper Lee, 1960.

"*The Count of Monte Cristo*" by Alexandre Dumas, 1851

"*The Winslow Boy*", Movie, 1948, Dir. Anthony Asquith, (available online).

"*Hurricane: The Story of Hurricane Carter*", Song lyric by Bob Dylan, 1976.

What are the similarities? (A person is wrongly accused. A member of a less-powerful cultural group—outsider/other—is judged unfairly by more powerful members/institutions of society.)

10. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maree Coote, a Melbourne-based writer and designer. She has written and published 18 books including various Australian history editions, and 12 children's titles. Her book SPELLBOUND won the prestigious Special Mention Prize at the 2017 Bologna Ragazzi Fiere in Italy, and was short listed in the CBCA awards the same year. She has twice won the New York Independent Publishers Gold (Regional) Award, and also the Royal Historical Society of Victoria Gold Award. In 2018/19 she was invited to South Korea for an extensive exhibition of her typographic illustrations. More information at www.melbournestyle.com.au

Other children's books by Maree Coote include:

Animology: The Big Book of Letter Art Alphabeasts

Letters From Australia

Alphabeasts

Letters From New York

Spellbound: Making Pictures with the A-B-C

Robin Boid: Architect

Andy Web: Artist

When you Go To Melbourne

Alphabet City Zoo

Letters From Melbourne

Alphabet City Melbourne

The Black Pot Belly

The Gum Queen

The Seacret of Driftus and Sprout



And for adults:

The Art of Being Melbourne (Art history)

The Melbourne Book: A History of Now Editions 1–4 (Culture/ history)

50 Neds: Ned Kelly, Icon of Australian Art

11. IMPORTANT SUPPORTING NOTES FOR TEACHERS, STATISTICS & REFERENCES

A. ON ABORIGINAL CUSTOM AND THE AZARIA CASE

Aboriginal deaths (by dingo or otherwise) were not routinely reported or recorded until 1975, and so there is no 'official' record of evidence about the problem. This meant that no record of Aboriginal people's historic experience, opinions and critical evidence about this kind of attack was available to the courts. Certain subjects including child death, and babies taken by dingoes are taboo in Indigenous culture, and Aboriginal law disallows the discussion of taboo subjects. Mainstream Australian Law therefore assumed that the problem did not occur, which was not the case, even though it was a fact of life as the Aborigines would later attest.

Only the head tribesman is allowed to 'know' about such things and 'tell' about them. For others, it was forbidden to discuss them. The lack of understanding in the mainstream Australian society about the ways of the Aboriginal people meant that vital evidence was not fully heard by the court. The omission of these voices led the authorities and the public to assert that "dingoes just don't do this", a notion which we know now is fundamentally untrue. Not only do dingoes *do* this, it is a matter of factual record that domestic dogs also do this. Therefore a terrible miscarriage of justice was exacerbated by ignorance of Aboriginal history. This is a tale of the ignorance of culture as well as the ignorance of the natural environment and of wildlife.

"Because white lives were considered more precious than Aboriginal lives, a bias towards enumerating settler fatalities exists in the historical record." —Overland, 'Indigenocide, the massacre of Aboriginal History', by Raymeon Evans and Bill Thorpe.

B. STATISTICAL RECORD OF DINGO ATTACK (**FATAL)

Since baby Azaria was taken in 1980, there have been at least 16 attacks by dingo, including three fatal attacks:

In 1998, a 3 year-old tourist was severely bitten by a dingo.



In 2001**, a 9 year-old boy was killed by dingoes on Fraser Island.



In 2005**, a 2 year-old girl died after attack by a dingo/dog crossbreed in New South Wales.



In 2006**, a 1 year-old girl died after attack by a dingo/dog crossbreed in Victoria.



In 2007, a 4 year-old girl was severely bitten in New South Wales.



In 2009, a woman was attacked at Devils Marbles.



In 2011, a 3 year-old girl was attacked and badly bitten by a dingo on Fraser Island.



In 2012, a dingo was 'put down' after attacking a family and menacing tourists on Fraser Island.



In 2012, tourist was hospitalised after an attack by dingo on Fraser Island.



In 2012, at Kakadu, a 14 year-old girl was dragged from her sleeping bag by a dingo.



In 2014, two women were bitten by a dingo while jogging on Fraser Island.



In 2017, a 25 year old woman attacked by a dingo at Lake McKenzie on Fraser Island



In 2018, a West Australian woman was severely attacked by a dingo and hospitalised.



In 2019, January, a 6 year old boy attacked by a dingo at Eurom on Fraser Island



In 2019, February 28, a 9 year old boy and his mother were attacked by a dingo on Fraser Island



In 2019, April 19th, a 14 month-old baby boy was dragged from his camper trailer on Fraser Island.

(Sources: Coroner Ellizabeth Morris SM, Coroner's Court, 12 June 2012; Wikipedia; ABC News)

12. FURTHER RESOURCES:

Books: 'A Dingo's got my baby! Words that divided a nation' by Lindy Chamberlain House, 2015; 'Evil Angels' by John Bryson, Penguin, 1985.

'The Rock: Travelling to Uluru', Barry Hill, Allen & Unwin 1994

Movies: 'A Cry in the Dark' (Evil Angels). 1988. Dir. Fred Schepisi, starring Meryl Streep.

Mini-Series: Through My Eyes: The Lindy Chamberlain Story, by Tony Cavanagh & Simone North, 2004

PART 1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ztlki80WM>

PART 2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w333ERVNizQ>

Opera: 'Lindy', Composer Moya Henderson & Librettist Judith Rodriguez, 2002, Opera Australia.

Play: 'Letters to Lindy', A play by Alana Valentine, 2017.

Websites: www.lindychamberlain.com.au;

www.johnbryson.net

Geoscience Australia www.gsa.org.au;

Interview: 7.30 Report, Jan. 10, 2017: Stan Grant and John Bryson. www.abc.net.au/7.30/evil-angels-author-john-bryson-on-the-death-of/8173674

Legal Findings:

1. All legal links at: <http://lindychamberlain.com/legal-process-and-findings/findings-and-transcripts/>

2. Coroner's final finding 2012. Inquest into the death of Azaria Chantel Loren Chamberlain [2012] NTMC 020

https://justice.nt.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/205377/azaria-chantel-chamberlain.pdf

Articles

1. Former Uluru chief ranger on dingo danger, Tony Eastley, Wednesday, June 13, 2012 07:17:00

<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2012/s3523826.htm>

2. Chamberlain case: the story of a lifetime,

<http://www.newsmediaworks.com.au/chamberlain-case-the-story-of-a-lifetime/>

3. Trackers' testimony neglected, Canberra Times Friday Dec 15 1995

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/133919999>

4. Azaria coroner now not so sure, The Canberra Times (ACT : 1926 - 1995) Sat 16 Dec 1995

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/133920299?searchTerm=Yesterday%2C%20original%20coroner%20Denis%20Barritt%20stood%20by%20his%201981%20finding%20that%2010-week-old%20Azaria%20was%20taken%20by%20a%20wild&searchLimits=sortby=dateDesc>

5. A third coronial inquiry has found a dingo was not responsible for Azaria Chamberlain's death,

writes JOHN BRYSON. The Canberra Times (ACT : 1926 - 1995) Sat 16 Dec 1995 Page 14 Saturday FORUM

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/133920359?searchTerm=responsible%20for%20Azaria%20Chamberlain%27s%20death%2C%20writes%20JOHN%20BRYSON&searchLimits=sortby=dateDesc>

6. Four Coroners, by John Bryson. The Last Azaria Chamberlain Inquest 'The Monthly'

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/july/1354240697/john-bryson/four-coroners>

7. Evil Angels, by John Bryson. www.lindychamberlain.com/Bryson-The-Tactician.pdf

8. Innocence Regained: The fight to free Lindy Chamberlain. 1989, Prologue By Norman H. Young

http://lindychamberlain.com/files/Prologue_to_Innocence_Regained.pdf



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