

A movie poster for the film 'Kangaroo'. The background is a warm, golden-hour photograph of a young woman with long brown hair, wearing a striped shirt and a dark vest, cradling a small, light-brown kangaroo in her arms. The kangaroo is wrapped in a patterned cloth and looks directly at the camera. The scene is set against a backdrop of a hilly, arid landscape under a bright, hazy sky. In the top right corner, there is a circular gold badge with white text. At the bottom, the title 'KANGAROO' is written in large, bold, orange letters, with a small kangaroo silhouette integrated into the letter 'A'. Below the title is the tagline 'TWO UNLIKELY FRIENDS. ONE EPIC ADVENTURE.' in white. The entire poster is framed by a solid orange border.

NOW A  
MAJOR  
AUSTRALIAN  
FILM

# KANGAROO

TWO UNLIKELY FRIENDS.  
ONE EPIC ADVENTURE.

## TEACHERS RESOURCES

# KANGAROO

## Teachers Resources by Casey Mulder

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# INTRODUCTION

*A heartwarming story about a young Indigenous girl and a disgraced TV host who form an unlikely friendship and work together to rescue and rehabilitate a group of orphaned joeys in a remote outback community.*

When Chris, a disgraced TV weatherman, finds himself stranded in an outback town, he teams up with 12-year-old Charlie, who is also new to the town. The pair form an unlikely friendship and work together to rescue and rehabilitate orphaned joeys in the remote outback community.

Based on a true story and the hit Australian film featuring Ryan Corr, Lily Whiteley, Deborah Mailman and Brooke Satchwell, *Kangaroo* is a heartwarming story about friendship, grief and finding your place in the world.

## BEFORE AND AFTER READING THE NOVEL

As a class, consider the cover of *Kangaroo*, and read the blurb on the back. Ask students to complete a See Think Wonder.

- See: What do you see/read on the cover?
- Think: What do you think this book will be about?
- Wonder: What questions do you now have about this book?

You may choose to have students share their responses in pairs or small groups.

After reading the novel, direct students to complete a Connect Extend Challenge.

- Connect: How was the story connected to what you saw/read on the cover?
- Extend: What new ideas were introduced that extended your thinking?
- Challenge: What is challenging or confusing? What do you still wonder about the story?

Considering these responses, have the students work in pairs to redesign the cover. The new cover must be annotated to indicate their reasoning for the changes made.

## THEMES

Consider the concept of Connection to Country.

Read the following article [Connection to Animals and Country \(https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country\)](https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country) on the Common Ground website and watch the following ABC YouTube video: [Connection to Country - BTN Special \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Oi6pJqYcs\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Oi6pJqYcs).

Using the understanding developed as a class, investigate the text for this theme. As students find textual evidence, invite them to note this down on the whiteboard or a Padlet. They should include the page number for each example.

Then, using the table, students should brainstorm additional key themes within the text, in pairs or small groups. Guide them using the list below, if assistance is required.

Aboriginal Peoples – Histories and Culture  
Aboriginal Peoples – Social Life and Customs  
Animal welfare  
Change



Connection to Country  
Courage  
Ethics  
Family relationships  
Friendship  
Grief  
Redemption

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Write a list of the themes in the text | Now select one theme and note down examples from the text where this theme is evident. Include the page number for each example. |
|--|--|

Now allocate one theme to each pair or group. They must now gather examples of where this theme is evident in the text. They should write this in the second column, including the page number for each example.

As a means of differentiating this activity, set a time, rather than asking for a set number of examples, and ask students to gather as many examples as they can within that timeframe (30 minutes, for example). This gathered information can then be collated digitally, as a resource for the continued study of this text.

## CURRICULUM TOPICS

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

#### POINT OF VIEW

This novel is written in third person limited, in past tense. Third person limited point of view means that as the reader, we are hearing the story from Charlie's perspective. Charlie is the central character to the plot. We are experiencing the story through Charlie's perspective.

Discussion:

How might this novel have different if it was from:

- Chris's perspective
- Mum's perspective
- Grandad's perspective?

## GENRE

This novel is an example of a rite of passage or coming of age novel. In this genre, the central character or characters (Charlie and Chris, in the case of *Kangaroo*) are going through an experience of change. Coming of age stories usually involve experiences that shape the characters' identities and understanding of the world.

Using this framework, map both Charlie's and Chris's experience of change throughout the novel.

|         | What happens at the start? | What challenges are experienced? | What has the character learned by the end of the story and how are they different? |
|---------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Charlie |                            |                                  |  |
| Chris   |                            |                                  |  |

Consider other novels and films you have seen that fit the coming of age genre. Brainstorm these on a poster in the room, throughout the duration of this unit of study.

## LITERARY DEVICES

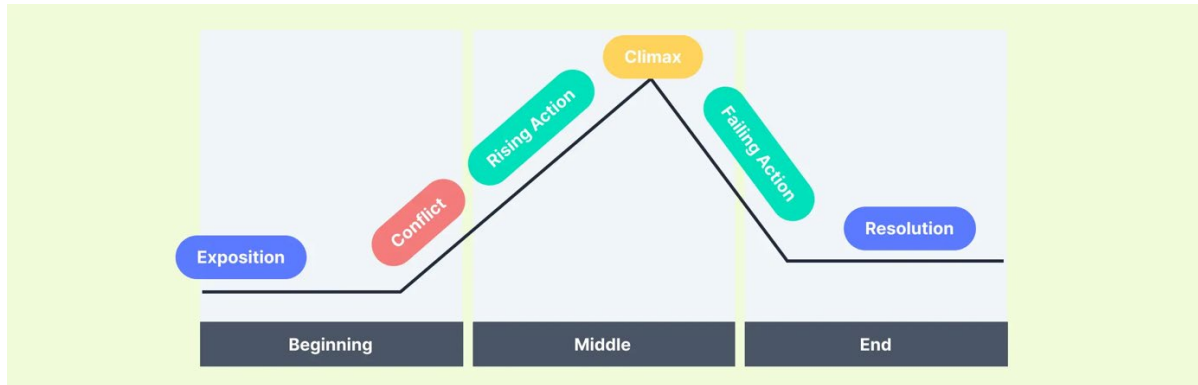
**Activity:** Discuss each of the literary devices below, as a class. Find examples of the use of literary devices in this novel, using the table below. One example of each has been provided.

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Simile          | <i>'Thanks for the support!' Chris replied, jumping from foot to foot like a boxer before a match. (p. 111)</i>  |
| Metaphors       | <i>'Alright, you big baby. I thought this would cheer you up,' Charlie said, rolling her eyes and giving him a side glance.' (p. 73)</i>   |
| Personification | <i>Roger leapt to his feet, standing at full attention. (p. 109)</i>   |
| Onomatopoeia    | <i>Grandad fired the starter and a loud bang filled the air. The teams began running awkwardly in their boats. (p. 119)</i>  |
| Symbolism       | <i>She grabbed her dad's old AFL jacket from the end of her bed and stomped through the house and out the front door, slamming it behind her. She stopped to look down at the logo on the back of Dad's jacket; a kangaroo leaping mid-air to catch a ball. With a sigh, she put it on over her shoulders even though it was miles too big, then started walking. (p. 4)</i>   |
| Juxtaposition   | <i>'What? No!' Chris cried, rushing towards it. 'Oh no, no, no, no, no!' He began pulling out sodden clothes looking like he was about to cry. 'Do you have any idea how expensive these clothes are? Most of them are dry-clean only!' 'Hope you find something to wear,' Charlie said nonchalantly. 'Not a lot of designer shops around here either.' She picked up her backpack. 'I'll be back after school. Don't forget to feed Liz.' (p. 54)</i> |

## STRUCTURE

### Mapping the plot

The Plot Diagram is an organisational tool focusing on a pyramid or triangular shape, which is used to map the events in a story. This mapping of plot structure allows readers and writers to visualise the key features of stories.



Explain each stage of the plot diagram to your students. This will likely be a revision task.

Then, by allocating one stage to each small group, have the students list the key plot points relevant to their allocated stage of the story.

Collate this visually, using poster paper and sticky notes, and display in the classroom for students to refer back to throughout the unit.

Suspense is also key to any narrative's structure.

*Discussion Point:* How does the author build suspense in the scene where Charlie and her friends hide the joeys from Trap and his mates.

## SETTING

The story is set in Silver Gum, a fictional town in the Northern Territory. The setting is established in the first three chapters and then elaborated on as the story progresses. The reader comes to understand that this setting is very different from Charlie's previous hometown (Broome, Western Australia).

*Discussion:*

- Why did Charlie and her mum move to Silver Gum?
- How does Charlie feel about the move at the start of the novel?
- How does she feel about Silver Gum at the end of the novel?
- What causes this change?

*Activity:* Go through the passages listed under Visual Thinking activities (where students are asked to create a visual representation of the town) and ask students to write a sentence, describing the town. Now create a whole class description of Silver Gum, in three sentences.

## CHARACTERS

Major Characters:  
Charlie, Chris Masterman

#### Minor Characters:

Mum, Nanna, Grandad, Dad (has passed away, but still features in the story posthumously), Jonesy (the lifeguard in Sydney), Miss Wheeler (school teacher), Casper, Freddy and Maya (Charlie's friends), Uncle Dave (mechanic and tow truck driver), Jesse (the chef at the pub), Bernadette (runs the baby shop), Trap (antagonist – truck driver), Lucky, Skip, Liz and Max (the joeys) and Roger (the teenage roo).

**Activity:** Locate a key quote or a plot point that describes or demonstrates the character traits of any two of these characters. Students can then compare their findings in pairs.

## WRITING TASKS

**Activity:** Write a letter from Chris to his manager (Human-Liz) to explain why he has decided not to take the new TV job and instead chooses to stay in Silver Gum.

**Activity:** Write a diary entry from Charlie's perspective, when she thinks Chris is about to leave town to become a TV host again.

**Activity:** Write a book review of this novel.

**Activity:** Create a brochure or the landing page of a website for either Nanna and Grandad's tourism business, or for the Kangaroo Sanctuary.

## VISUAL LITERACY

**Activity:** Design a new cover for this book – one that features at least three characters and at least one key element of the setting (for example, Chris's shed).

**Activity:** Draw a visual representation of Silver Gum that includes the following – the Kangaroo Highway, Silver Gum Primary school with the dry grass oval, the art gallery where Mum works, Uncle Dave's mechanics shop, Nanna and Grandad's tourism business with the bus parked outside, the pub, home, Nanna and Grandad's house and Chris's shed.

Use the following descriptions of Silver Gum to assist you:

*She slipped outside and walked through the main street of town. It was quiet. All the kids were still in school for the next little while and everyone else going about their days. A few tourists meandered down Main Street, reading signs about the history of Silver Gum and snapping photographs. Charlie couldn't understand why anyone would want to visit Silver Gum. Other than the kangaroos, there wasn't much to see. The town consisted of the art gallery Mum worked at, a pub which was the only place to grab a proper sit-down meal, a coffee shop, a bakery, a police station, a grocery store and a few boutique stores that sold clothes or toys or other miscellaneous things. There was also the office where Nanna and Grandad ran their tour business, taking tourists on guided bus rides up to Alice Springs or to sites nearby within Tjoritja, West MacDonnell National Park. Charlie gave Nanna a wave through the window as she walked past it. Nanna waved back from behind the desk, looking slightly confused at the sight of Charlie walking down the main street during school hours.*

*Charlie reached the end of Main Street and, even though she'd told Mum she'd only be five minutes, she found herself heading out of town towards the Kangaroo Highway. (pp. 27–28)*

*They were standing with Grandad in front of Nanna and Grandad's tin shed, a tiny structure in the middle of nowhere. Thirsty land stretched around them, with patches of saltbush, clumps of spinifex and ghost gums scattered across the horizon.*

*'No,' Chris said. 'No, no, no. I can't stay here. You couldn't pay me to stay here.'*  
*'It's private,' Charlie offered. 'But not too far from town, see?' She pointed behind them where*

*they could see the roofs of town a little way in the distance. 'And a flash film crew stayed here once, didn't they, Grandad?'*

*'Well, they stored their equipment here,' Grandad said. He pushed the door open. 'Hold on just a moment.' He turned on a light and peered inside. He looked around then stepped back out again. 'Okay. No snakes. You're good.' (pp. 42–43)*

*Charlie laughed and ran off with her friends. They ran down Main Street, past the pub and the gallery and the grocery store and the coffee shop, their legs pumping in perfect unison. At the end of Main Street, they turned and followed the dusty dirt road to the outskirts of town until they finally reached the shed, their faces flushed but stretched with smiles. (p. 149)*

**Activity:** Create a six-panel comic strip of either of these two scenes from the novel

- Charlie first meets Chris and Kangaroo-Liz
- Charlie and her friends rescue the joeys from Trap and his mates.

Students can either do this on paper or digitally. Canva, Storyboard That and Pixton can be used to create a digital comic.

## FURTHER QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

### FURTHER ACTIVITIES

1. Compare this novel to other junior fiction novels featuring Aboriginal female protagonists – especially *Bindi* by Kirli Saunders and *Black Cockatoo* by Hakea Hustler and Carl Merrison [See **Bibliography**]. What are the similarities and differences between Charlie, Bindi and Mia?
2. Debate Chris's decision to stay in Silver Gum rather than take the TV host job. What decision would you have made, and why?
3. Locate and study poems about animals, and then select an animal of your choice and write a poem.

## CONCLUSION

*Kangaroo* is a coming-of-age story of Charlie's move to Silver Gum in the Northern Territory and her mission to keep her dad's memory alive, by looking after sick and injured kangaroos. She finds an unlikely ally in this mission, and together they bring the residents of Silver Gum together and they discover what really matters in life is not fame or reliving the past, but friendship and living with a sense of purpose.



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## NON-FICTION

Connection to Country - BTN Special

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9Oi6pJqYcs>

Connection to Animals and Country

<https://www.commonground.org.au/article/connection-to-animals-and-country>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

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