



My  
**DEADLY**  
**BOOTS**

Carl Merrison &  
Hakea Hustler

illustrated by  
Samantha Campbell

**TEACHERS RESOURCES**

# TEACHERS NOTES

## MY DEADLY BOOTS

*My Deadly Boots* is a picture book written by Carl Merrison and Hakea Hustler, and illustrated by Samantha Campbell. The story follows a young boy who has just bought a new pair of footy boots that make him feel confident and deadly. He wears them all around town, standing up to people who question why he has such flashy shoes. When he briefly misplaces his boots, his grandfather helps him to realise that his real strength comes from within and through connection to his culture.

*My Deadly Boots* explores ideas of identity and belonging, confidence and the strength of First Nations cultures.

### BEFORE READING

- **Activity:** Ask students to bring in an item of clothing that makes them feel confident and powerful. This task can be scaffolded to ensure that students do not feel any pressure — provide them with examples of low-stakes items that would be within reach for students of any background, such as a favourite t-shirt or lucky pair of socks. Have students sit in a circle and explain why their object is important to them. Allow them to ask questions about each item. Ask them to consider how they came to own the item, and how long it has been important to them. Ask students to consider the similarities and differences between the items that they chose. What patterns can they discern?
- **Discussion:** Ask students to think of characters from books or movies that wear outfits that make them feel confident and powerful. If needed, you can prompt their thinking by sharing examples like superheroes. Ask students to consider what makes these costumes so special. Consider the colours, the materials and the history of the uniforms.
- **Discussion:** Begin by showing students the front cover of the book and reading the title aloud. Ask students what the word 'deadly' means. Encourage students to use the artwork on the cover to help them understand the different connotations of the term. If your cohort of students is unfamiliar with the term 'blackfella', use this as an opportunity to frontload the discussion of the term. Exercising discretion based on the demographics of your cohort, scaffold a discussion about how these terms are used by different communities.

### AFTER READING

- **Activity:** Ask students to share any experience they might have of saving up to buy something for themselves. Scaffold the discussion with a range of examples that would be accessible for all students. Why do they think the main character emphasises that he has 'waited really long'? What does this tell readers about how the boy feels about the shoes? How do they feel when they have to wait for something? Ask them to name as many emotions as they can.

- **Activity:** Ask students to consider the way that the boots are described at the start of the book. Discuss how the text uses nouns, verbs and adjectives to describe the shoes. Identify each part of speech that the main character uses as he unboxes his new boots. What are some other ways that students could describe the boots after they have looked at the picture on the page? Students could construct a similar description for their own item of clothing, following the pattern used in the text. Have students share their examples with each other. How do they compare to the original text?
- **Discussion:** Point students' attention to the colour palette of the text. What do they notice about the words that are in white and orange? How does this colour change or shape the reader's understanding of the text?
- **Activity:** Review each page of writing with the students, focusing on how the boy sees his boots. Create a chart to help students infer the roles that the boots play in creating his sense of self.

Description of the boots	Role of the boots
spikes on the bottom	grip the ground for football or running
my favourite colour	makes the boy happy
blackfella don't need to be labelled	
reaching my own goal	
dream big	
fighting away the blues	
too speedy to lose	
find a partner and walk in twos	
save up for your own	
jump the highest in my crew	
I'll pass them down to you	
Why aren't blackfellas allowed flash boots?	
standing my ground	
truth telling	
run faster than my cousin-brother	
kick the best torpedo	
healthy lifestyle	
walking in two worlds	
give me confidence	
very own	
string them round my neck	
won't lose them again	
know my place in the world with or without them	

- **Activity:** Reread the book with students, focusing on the rhymes that the main character uses to describe his shoes. Have them repeat the rhymes aloud, to build

students' understanding of the rhythm of the text. Why do they think rhyme is used on this page? Ask them to create their own rhymes, this time using the word 'boots'. Have them repeat each other's rhymes aloud, focusing again on the rhythm created by the rhyming schemes.

- **Activity:** Reread the book with students. Ask them to count how many times the boy repeats that his boots are 'making [him] too deadly'. Why does the boy repeat this line? What does that show about how he feels about his boots? What can they infer about how the boy felt before he received his boots in the mail? How does the image of the boy's shoes and reflected face show the reader his new sense of confidence?
- **Discussion:** One of the central themes of *My Deadly Boots* is confidence. Unpack the term with students. Ask them when they feel confident, and when they do not. What is similar and different in their responses? Have they ever tried wearing a costume or special shoes to help them feel more confident? Have they ever had anyone help them feel secure, the way that the boy's grandfather helps him? How might they help a friend who isn't feeling comfortable or strong?
- **Discussion:** Ask students to consider where the book might be set. You may provide them with some examples of remote communities. Have them look at the book's illustrations. What do they notice about the main character's town that is similar, or different, to their own community? For example, they may consider the fact that the boots arrive via plane.
- **Activity:** Have students consider the plant life on display in the book. If they are not familiar with the plant life in the outback, discuss the assumptions that they might have about what grows in desert landscapes. Share some images of the plant life with them. Take students into the yard and ask them to consider what plants they would include if they were making a book about their own item of clothing. Students could select samples of some plants and make a sample sheet using the leaves themselves.
- **Activity:** Ask students to consider how the plants have been drawn in the book. Have students consider the repetitive motions that have created these landscape images. Have them experiment with drawing the leaves and plants that they have collected. Can they replicate the book's style? What colours would they use to draw the plants in the schoolyard? Are they different to the colours used in the book?
- **Discussion:** One of the central themes of the book is belonging, and how this connects to the main character's cultural identity. Ask students to consider what 'two worlds' the boy is living in. Have students discuss how the different pages in the text connect to these two different worlds. Do the activities have to fit into only one world or the other? The boy's uncle encourages him to feel the sand between his toes. Why might this be important to the boy and his uncle? How does the boy's family help him understand his place in the world? What role does his country play in creating this sense of belonging?
- **Activity:** Have students consider how the boy feels about other people's reactions to his boots. What is implied in how his friends and family describe his boots? The chart below can help shape students' responses.

Description	Implication
Sister says I think myself high class in these boots	
Teacher says I should wear school shoes	
My mate says I should swap him boots	
Policeman asks where I got my boots	
Coach says they are just footy boots	
My uncle asks why I need boots	

- **Discussion:** How do students feel when others comment on their clothes or costumes? What strategies can they use to help themselves feel confident to focus on their own opinion? Brainstorm responses that students can use if people criticise their outfits.
- **Discussion:** Have students identify the moment that the main character's relationship to his boots changes. Who helps him realise that it was not his boots that make him the person that he is?
- **Discussion:** Have students consider each of the images of the boots. What do they notice about how the boots appear on the page? Provide them with a colour wheel and ask them to consider whether the illustrations use complementary colours. Ask students to consider the relative brightness of the colours on the page, and the impact this has on how we see the boots. How does this change depending on where the boy is in his town? How does the illustrator create a sense of movement and magic around the boots?
- **Activity:** Ask students to consider the end pages of the book. What do they notice about the motifs included in the images? Draw their attention to the footprints in the images. How do these footprints reflect the boy's journey in the book?

## NOTE FROM THE ILLUSTRATOR

The illustrations were created using an iPad Pro and digital crayon and pencil, then refined in Adobe Photoshop.

'I found inspiration by drawing on my own experiences growing up on remote Aboriginal communities across the NT. I was also inspired by the stories my husband shared about his childhood growing up in Alice Springs as a young Aboriginal footballer.'