



Yellow Truck Road Train

Mandy Tootell

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Format: Hardback picture book

Recommended for 4-8-year-olds

Summary

Dad is waiting for the wet season to end so Yellow Truck Road Train can get back to work.

There are cattle and donkeys to load, kangaroos to look out for, heat and dust, and always plenty to do.

This is a book for lovers of big and powerful things.

Yellow Truck Road Train is big, bigger than almost anything - except the Top End of Australia! And to emphasise its size Mandy Tootell's illustrations capture scenes from the young narrator's low-down perspective, magnifying its sheer disappear-into-the-distance bulk, with its 16 axles and five trailers. Adding to its impressiveness are the arrow shapes on its bodywork, suggesting an immensely powerful machine that must forever move forward.

A pull-out 'Anatomy of a Road Train' at the back of the book will be devoured by readers who want more information about this man-made phenomenon.

Tootell's illustrations at first glance appear realistic. Yet on closer inspection they feature a collage device where the ground over which Yellow Truck Road Train drives is a map of the places traversed.

Yellow Truck Road Train can be enjoyed by everyone for its Top End lingo, too. *Cheeky buffalo, Boss Man, bogie, 'ave a safe one* are just a few of the authentic terms used in the story. And a handy mini-dictionary at the back completes the picture, while the endpapers celebrate the landscapes of the Northern Territory.



Themes

- Transport • Outback • Seasons • Top End • Travel • Camping • Cattle •
- Livestock • Remote and regional towns •

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Discussion questions

- Before reading *Yellow Truck Road Train* examine closely the book's front cover and title and ask the following questions:
 - Can you name the animals you can see?
 - In which country do you think the story will be set?
 - Will it be set in the outback or a big city?
 - What kind of machine is on the cover?
 - Why do people drive these machines long distances in Australia?
- Read the story through once and then close the book and ask the following questions:
 - Why do you think the dry season might be better than the wet season to drive Yellow Truck Road Train?
 - What type of animals does Yellow Truck Road Train transport?
 - Do you think you would like to go on a long journey in Yellow Truck Road Train?
 - What do you think the best things would be about living in Yellow Truck Road Train?
 - What might you miss from home if you lived in Yellow Truck Road Train?
 - Did you like the story? Why?
- In a general discussion talk about the term 'road train' and how these particular trucks differ from the sort you might expect to see in a city. Open out the Anatomy of a Road Train gatefold pages for the class to examine. Ask why students think road trains are used in areas that are sparsely populated. Now turn attention to the location of this story, the Northern Territory. Show a map of Australia to the class and ask if anyone can point to the NT and name any of the famous places or landmarks there. [Hint: Darwin, Alice Springs, Uluru, Kakadu National Park]
- Now open the book again and draw attention to the way the road is depicted on almost every page. Point out the very thin coloured lines, grids, numbers and tiny writing. Ask if anyone can guess where you might see this kind of pattern. [Hint: it is a map] Ask why the illustrator might have wanted to include a map in a story about a road train truck that travels long, long distances. Might it be showing where the road train has been and is going?
- Go back to the beginning of the story and draw attention to the sky on every page and ask students to name what they can see that sits in the sky during the wet season (the first double-page spread and later pages towards the end of the story) but is missing in the dry season sky. Ask students what the link between clouds and rain is.

- Ask students if they can name the four seasons and describe what the weather is like in winter, spring, summer and autumn. Now explain that in the Northern Territory, where this story is set, there are only two seasons – wet and dry. Lead a discussion about what might happen when it is wet season (lots of rain makes the plants flower, grass grow, some small frogs come out of the ground, and everyone is sweating!) and when it is dry season (less rain so less plants, bright blue skies, more comfortable to live in).
- [For older students] Ask students to compare the image of Yellow Truck Road Train on the first double-page spread with the image on the gatefold pages titled Anatomy of a Road Train. Both images are of the same thing but the first shows the truck as a 3D object while the second shows it as a 'flat' 2D object. Ask them to explain the difference (explanations will vary according to age) and encourage them to draw a 2D square and 3D cube.
- Turn to the double-page spread where Yellow Truck Road Train is heading towards a group of kangaroos at night and talk about how the kangaroos in the foreground are bigger than those in the background and that this is another way to create depth on a page. Now discuss how sometimes the way words look can create extra drama in the story. Look at the words *Watch Out for kangaroos* here and ask students to describe how they look different than the words in the rest of the story. Ask students why they think they are different at this particular point in the story.
- Ask students to answer the following questions by turning to the back of the story and reading the definitions for some of the lesser-known words. In some cases they will need to go back to certain pages in the story also.
 - Dad has to pick up which 'cheeky' animal in Yellow Truck Road Train?
 - What sort of food is a truck steak?
 - Why does the little boy give the poddy calf a bottle of milk in the story?
 - What kind of animal is a weaner and where does Dad take them in the story?
 - What does the term 'feral' mean in terms of the buffalos and donkeys living in the Northern Territory?
- General Discussion: the boy in the story loves going to work with his dad. Ask students if anyone in the class ever goes to work with a parent, guardian or older friend and if they can describe the sort of things they saw and learned.



Author's comments

'Yellow Truck Road Train is a real story, inspired by my husband, Matches. Sometimes one or the other of our little boys will go on a trip in the truck with him. We live in Katherine in the Northern Territory. Daisy, the poddy calf from the story, is still our pet, along with a couple of chestnut ponies, Dolly and Buddy and our black-and-white dogs, Saba and Banjo. *Yellow Truck Road Train* is my first book: I also enjoy drawing, printmaking and sewing, and was an art teacher before running a remote mobile playgroup. I created this book to celebrate Yellow Truck Road Train and the landscape of the Northern Territory.'

— Mandy Tootell

About the author

Mandy Tootell lives in Katherine in the Northern Territory with her husband, a road train driver, and her two sons. They also have two horses, two pet cows and two black and white dogs on their rural block. Mandy completed a Bachelor of Visual Art from James Cook University and a Bachelor of Education from Queensland University of Technology before taking off overseas to travel for a couple of years. Originally from the Whitsundays, Mandy has lived in Townsville, Brisbane, Bristol, London, Charters Towers, Darwin, and now Katherine. Although Mandy is primarily a printmaker, she enjoys a range of art-making. She is handy with scissors and a glue stick, and keeps visual journals for inspiration with a focus on natural surroundings including animals, birds and the Northern Territory culture and environment. *Yellow Truck Road Train* is her first book.

