



Getting Dusty

written by Jared Thomas

OVERVIEW

When Dusty bloodies his bully's nose in a soccer tournament, he finds himself grounded for a week.

Feeling this is unfair, Dusty gets upset and it's up to Uncle Xbox to help him understand why his actions have consequences and that he can learn from his mistakes. If this lesson includes spending time on Country, catching some nice waves and making new friends, well, who is he to argue.

Getting Dusty is the much-anticipated sequel to Jared Thomas' CBCA longlisted junior fiction, *Uncle Xbox* (2023).

- Great for reluctant readers
- Highly engaging, coming-of-age story
- Clear messaging promoting environmental awareness and respect, learning from mistakes and second chances
- For surf and football (soccer) lovers

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Jared Thomas is a Nukunu person of the Southern Flinders Ranges and the Adelaide University Coordinator of Indigenous Collections and Archives. His novel *Calypso Summer* (Magabala Books, 2014) joined the 2015 International Youth Library White Raven list of books that deserve worldwide attention because of their universal themes and exceptional artistic and literary style. Jared's recent releases include *Uncle Xbox* (Magabala Books, 2023), *Songs that Sound Like Blood* (Magabala Books, 2016) as well as the *Game Day* series which was written with NBA player and Olympian Patty Mills. Jared loves surfing with his family and friends.

THEMES

- Role Models; Mentorship
- Respect
- Forgiveness
- Creation Stories; Spirituality
- Resilience
- Identity
- First Nations Peoples: Cultural Knowledge



AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Getting Dusty is the second book in Jared Thomas's *Uncle Xbox* series. When Dusty stands up to the school bully, he finds himself suspended for fighting. Grounded by his furious mother, Uncle Rick – nicknamed Uncle Xbox by Dusty – decides it's time to return to Country to continue sharing cultural knowledge and important lessons about respect and restraint to his nephew. With important lessons about trust, truth and resilience, Dusty learns that making mistakes does not make him a bad person. He also comes to understand that there are many lessons to be learnt from such slip-ups. The writing style is engaging and well-paced, with short chapters that maintain momentum and build in tension. Told in first person, past tense, the storytelling is direct and relatable. Middle readers will easily identify with Dusty as he learns to move forward from his missteps, guided by the patient, gentle yet firm mentorship of his uncle.

LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum (V8.4 and V9):

Learning area	Year level
English	3-6; 7
HASS	3-4
Geography	7

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions, cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading, discuss the title, cover, and blurb of the book. Make predictions about the story.
- Discuss how tension and the complication is so quickly introduced in Chapter 1. Why is this important when planning narratives?
- As you read Chapter 1, take note of how the author uses Show Don't Tell to describe the soccer tournament and what follows. How are readers encouraged to visualise and engage with the text?
- Dusty says, 'I didn't really want to punch Wayde but what choice did I have?' (p9). What other options did he have? What accountability do the onlookers yelling, 'Fight, fight, fight!' have in this scenario? What is the most appropriate action to take if a dispute flares up?
- Knowing his mum is about to receive a call from the school office, Dusty thinks about how furious she will be. If you were in a similar situation, how would your parents react? Why doesn't Dusty try harder to defend himself to Mr Simmons?
- Why does Uncle Xbox say that even though his nose may be broken, Wayde still got the better of Dusty? What does his uncle suggest would have been a better strategy? Explain why he believes this? What are your thoughts?
- In a letter to Dusty, explain why he is in the wrong for having fought with Wayde.
- Why do you think Mr Simmons watches Dusty's 'every move like a hawk,' (p24) but goes easier on Wayde? Are there different rules for different people? Discuss.
- Dusty feels he's been hard done by because he's being punished for 'sticking up for [himself]', prompting him to consider whether he's a 'bad kid or just unlucky' (p25). What do you think? Share in a reflection.
- What is the difference between being a 'bad kid' and making 'a mistake' (p25)? Why is it important to make this distinction?
- What is it that is really making Dusty feel sad? (see Ch 4)?
- What does Uncle Xbox mean when he says, 'you can't know wrong if you haven't been taught right' (p26). Why does he want to take Dusty 'back to country' (p27)? How will this help him?
- When Uncle Xbox takes Dusty back to Nukunu Country, why does he want Dusty to, 'store it all in your mind like a photo' (p30)? How does this help to understand the importance of Country, kinship and stories in First Nations cultures?
- What does Dusty learn about culture from his time on Country with Uncle Xbox, Poppa and Uncle Fred? Create a graphic organiser to share your ideas.
- How do your extended family members help you to grow as a person? Share in a reflection.
- What does Dusty learn about respect in *Getting Dusty*?
- In a reflection, explain how the story of Arkurra and Utnyu might help Dusty to grow (see Ch 5).
- Discuss Uncle Xbox's statement that it's 'important to forgive ourselves so that we can be of use to others. We're not of use to ourselves and others if we're beating ourselves up' (p33). Have you ever needed to forgive yourself for a mistake or wrongdoing? How did this help? Share in a reflection.
- What does Poppa mean when he says, 'when you're strong and smart, you need to be careful' (p37)? How does this message play out in *Getting Dusty*?
- Why is the story of the Watnyi Thura shared with Dusty (see p38-40)? How does this share the value of stories and passing down knowledge?



CLASSROOM IDEAS

- In your own words, create an illustrated retelling of the story of Nhawiranha and Wirttu (see Ch 7). How does hearing this story help Dusty?
- Discuss the following extract from *Getting Dusty*: ‘Why do people always think they’re the locals and act all tough when really it’s Aboriginal mob who are the locals?’ (p51).
- Discuss how figurative language is used to describe the waves and surfing experience at the secret spot. Examples include:
 - ▷ ‘...hugging the edge of the cliff face, the jagged reef beneath our feet...’ (p68)
 - ▷ ‘...we were in deep enough water to start paddling out to the back of the break, rolling over the shoulder of the waves.’ (p68)
 - ▷ ‘...the waves started to curl, looking as big as a house.’ (p68)
 - ▷ ‘...holding my board like I was Superman as the wave rolled over me.’ (p68)
 - ▷ ‘...another freight train of a wave.’ (p69)
 - ▷ ‘...a little lump of water started to form into a big wall...’ (p70)
 - ▷ ‘...I saw the wave’s lip arch over me.’ (p71)
 - ▷ ‘...I realised that the wave could gobble me up at any moment...’ (p71)
 - ▷ ‘...before I knew it I was inside the barrelling wave, the morning sun streaming through the water.’ (p74)
 - ▷ ‘It felt like my feet were glued to my board...’ (p75)
 - ▷ ‘...I’d been completely worked over by the wave.’ (p76)
 - ▷ ‘The waves...were like glass, not a ripple in them.’ (p85)
 - ▷ ‘...skating along the face of the wave...’ (p86)
 - ▷ ‘...a section jacking up in front of me and pulling me into the wave like a giant vacuum cleaner.’ (p87)
 - ▷ ‘I was getting thrown around like a ragdoll...’ (p87)
 - ▷ ‘Clean lines of swell rolled over the reef.’ (p106)
- How is Janet like Wayde? How does Uncle Xbox model to Dusty how to diffuse a tense situation? What does Dusty learn from this? How does he apply this later in the story?
- Make predictions about what might happen when Dusty goes surfing with his new friends while Uncle Xbox is in town (see p86+). What does Dusty learn from this experience?
- In the role of Dusty, write a journal entry about going surfing without Uncle Xbox and feeling disappointed with yourself. (see p88/Ch 12).
- Discuss how Uncle Xbox manages his anger and disappointment when Dusty disobeys him. Why does he give Dusty the space to think about his actions rather than cut the trip short and go straight home? Why does he say, ‘It’s only a waste if you haven’t learned your lesson...’ (p94)? In a reflection, share a time when you learnt a lesson the hard way.
- How does Dusty wanting to tell his mum ‘the truth’ show his growth? Discuss Uncle Xbox’s statement that ‘the truth always works best’ (p93).
- With a partner, reenact the scene in which Dusty apologises to Wayde (see p99). Why won’t Wayde accept the apology? How important is accepting apologies when they are offered? What advice would you like to give Wayde?
- Discuss how the narrative circles back to the soccer match and altercation with Wayde. How is this circular structure an effective way to tell stories?
- Why does Dusty say, ‘...I held off from teasing Wayde... because I just knew it wasn’t worth it’ (p100)? In a paragraph, explain his character development from the start to finish of *Getting Dusty*.
- What are Dusty’s biggest take-aways in *Getting Dusty*? What are your biggest take-aways? Why? Share in a reflection.
- What is the significance of Uncle Xbox taking Dusty surfing again at the end of the text?
- In what ways is Uncle Xbox a role model to Dusty? Give evidence from the text to support your ideas.
- What does *Getting Dusty* share about the importance of respect and honesty?
- Using the graphics at the start of each chapter as prompts, create a graphic organiser to record the story’s main plot.
- What do we learn about the importance of First Nations’ connection to Country through *Getting Dusty*?
- Create a Thought Tunnel by lining up two rows of students facing one another. Choose volunteers to assume the roles of Dusty, Wayde and Uncle Xbox. As these characters walk through the tunnel, have students ask questions of them to help better understand and unpack the story.
- Choose a scene to retell in the style of a graphic novel.
- Time-permitting, read the first book in the series, *Uncle Xbox*, as a companion text.



APPENDIX – LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year Curriculum Area V9

3 English - Literature

- Discuss characters, events and settings in different contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors and illustrators [AC9E3LE01](#)
- Discuss connections between personal experiences and character experiences in literary texts and share personal preferences [AC9E3LE02](#)
- Discuss how an author uses language and illustrations to portray characters and settings in texts, and explore how the settings and events influence the mood of the narrative [AC9E3LE03](#)
- Create and edit imaginative texts, using or adapting language features, characters, settings, plot structures and ideas encountered in literary texts [AC9E3LE05](#)

HASS - Geography

- The ways First Nations Australians in different parts of Australia are interconnected with Country/Place [AC9HS3K04](#)
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4 English - Literature

- Discuss how authors and illustrators make stories engaging by the way they develop character, setting and plot tensions [AC9E4LE03](#)
- Examine the use of literary devices and deliberate word play in literary texts, including poetry, to shape meaning [AC9E4LE04](#)
- Create and edit literary texts by developing storylines, characters and settings [AC9E4LE05](#)

HASS - Geography

- Sustainable use and management of renewable and non-renewable resources, including the custodial responsibility First Nations Australians have for Country/Place [AC9HS4K06](#)
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5 English - Literature

- Identify aspects of literary texts that represent details or information about historical, social and cultural contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors [AC9E5LE01](#)
 - Recognise that the point of view in a literary text influences how readers interpret and respond to events and characters [AC9E5LE03](#)
 - Examine the effects of imagery, including simile, metaphor and personification, and sound devices in narratives, poetry and songs [AC9E5LE04](#)
 - Create and edit literary texts, experimenting with figurative language, storylines, characters and settings from texts students have experienced [AC9E5LE05](#)
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English - Literature

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- Identify responses to characters and events in literary texts, drawn from historical, social or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors [AC9E6LE01](#)
 - Explain the way authors use sound and imagery to create meaning and effect in poetry [AC9E6LE04](#)
 - Create and edit literary texts that adapt plot structure, characters, settings and/or ideas from texts students have experienced, and experiment with literary devices [AC9E6LE05](#)
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7 English - Literature

- identify and explore ideas, points of view, characters, events and/or issues in literary texts, drawn from historical, social and/or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors [AC9E7LE01](#)
- identify and explain the ways that characters, settings and events combine to create meaning in narratives [AC9E7LE05](#)
- identify and explain how literary devices create layers of meaning in texts including poetry [AC9E7LE06](#)
- create and edit literary texts that experiment with language features and literary devices encountered in texts [AC9E7LE07](#)

HASS - Geography

- The cultural connectedness of people to places and how this influences their identity, sense of belonging and perceptions of a place, in a particular the cultural connectedness of First Nations Australians to Country/Place
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