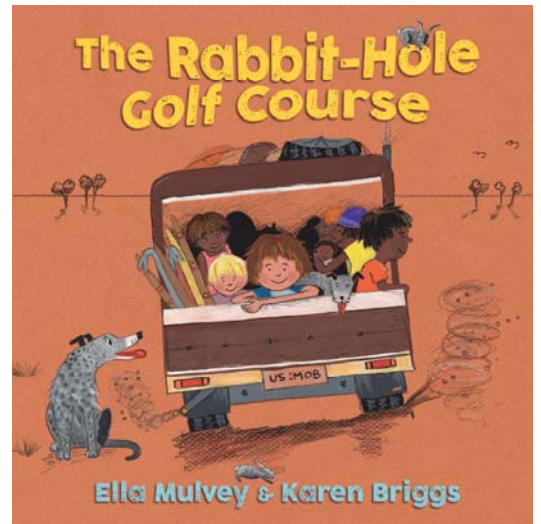


The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course

By Ella Mulvey,
illustrated by Karen Briggs



July 2017 ISBN 9781925266290 Hardback picture book
Recommended for 3 – 6 year olds

Summary

This is a warm and funny story, with a fantastic rhythmic read-aloud text that tells of a little girl heading into the outback with a group of Aboriginal women to hunt for a pet rabbit. It's based on the real-life experiences of the author who spent part of her childhood in the desert in Ernabella, or Pukatja, an Indigenous community 30 km south of the Northern Territory border.

Karen Briggs' bold, child-centred illustrations are packed with the warm desert colours of outback Australia, while Ella Mulvey's text ties in beautifully by highlighting the sounds and sights of the desert and the interaction of people with it. Her playful rhythms and charming combination of sounds, 'Bump click, Thump tick, Shake hop, Pinch pop, Dig tap, Swing clap', make this perfect for preschool story time and lead naturally to word and musical play and nature study.

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The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course fits well into *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, specifically, Outcome 2: 'Children are connected with and contribute to their world.'

Author Motivation

'This story is inspired by my time spent in central Australia when I was a kid. We lived in a place called Ernabella, also known as Pukatja, for five years. Someone came to school with a pet rabbit. The land around there was riddled with wild rabbits. I told Mum I wanted one too. Some of Mum's friends, Anangu women from the arts centre, heard about it and said they would take me to find one.

'We were unsuccessful at the time but the memory lived on in my mind. Probably the story is partly constructed, partly true because I know memory can be unreliable.

'When I wrote it, I was thinking of the sounds of that place and the people. I used those rhythms when I was making the story. I say making because the way I worked was like I was doing a puzzle.'

—Ella Mulvey

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'The characters were developed from photographs of Ella's time living on the community with her parents in Ernabella, South Australia.

'The storyline has a lot going on so the illustrations have lots of characters, and a whole lot of other details going on in the background that I had fun inventing. 'The main characters are young Ella and her baby sister along with a close friend. Ella wanted me to emphasise that while the outing was led by the Aboriginal women of the community, there were also non-Aboriginal women and children present.'

—Karen Briggs

Use in kindergarten and pre-school programs

Story Prediction

- Before opening *The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course* consider the front cover and the endpapers. What sort of story do students think this might be? Will it be a happy or sad story? Is the story set in Australia? What part of Australia might it be set in? What clues in the picture helped you to guess?
- After reading the story ask students to explain what they think the story was about. Were their earlier guesses correct? A variation on this exercise is to cover up the words on each double-page spread and ask students to describe what is happening in each of the illustrations.

Story Interpretation

- Did the children ever find a rabbit to take home as a pet? (We see rabbits at the end of the story. What do your young readers make of them? Real? Dreamt?)
- Did the children have a good time nevertheless?

Bush Tucker

- Ask your class about the food that is found in the book and open up a discussion about the sort of food they like to eat that comes from the land. The class can examine each other's lunch boxes and identify which parts of their lunch come from the land.
- In the exercise above, did the children classify the bread in their sandwiches as coming from the land? Indigenous Australians were the first bakers in the world. (See <http://www.sbs.com.au/food/article/2016/10/06/were-indigenous-australians-worlds-first-bakers> .) Their stone grinding tools, to make flour from grass seeds, were found all around Australia and there are probably many more still out there in the bush. Do you have the facilities to make damper together?
- '...we pull out the roots with our hands. We tap out the maku hiding inside and fling them on the fire to eat for tea.' Look at the picture: what do the children think *maku* are? This is the second example of an edible insect in the book.
- As well as clap sticks, the illustrator has shown the women and children using digging sticks. What other tools for getting and cooking bush tucker do the children know about? Boomerang and spear are often thought of, but what about catching fish? Lizards? Burrowing animals? How do you carry the food back to camp? How do you cook it? Explore the useful tools of Indigenous life. A starting point is <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-indigenous-tools-and-technology> . All major Australian museums have a large Indigenous section to explore.



Word Play and Musical Play

- Try making simple clap sticks in class. To see the wide variety of clap stick styles, just search for 'clap sticks' in Google Images. Clap sticks sound best if made from dense wood; broomsticks will work well. The children might like to decorate them.
- Re-read the story emphasising the rhythmic beat of the text and have students use their clap sticks to follow the beat every time you reach the italicised words in the text such as *Bump click, Bump click, Bump click* and *Thump tick, Thump tick, Thump tick*.
- This story is also about nature play and connecting with your home. What animals and plants are there in your area and what sounds do they make? Do they *shake hop*? Encourage the kids to explore. Get down low to look for ants, or lie down and look up to watch for birds. There might be a bird in a tree and maybe it goes *whistle swoop*. Play together outside and make up your own verse as a group about your 'home'.

Caring for Country

- Explain to your class that the women in the story are the original custodians of the rabbit-hole golf course and that every part of Australia has its own Indigenous custodians. Find out more about the traditional custodians of your specific area; <http://files.acecqa.gov.au/files/NEL/engaging-with-aboriginal-communities1.pdf> . Learn words in the local language group.
- Many kindergartens and primary schools are introducing 'Welcome to Country' or 'Thank you' rituals, where children acknowledge traditional owners and/or express appreciation of the abundance of nature and promise to look after our land. See <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2017/05/10/watch-adorable-video-4-year-old-doing-acknowledgement-country> . (Note the inclusion of gross motor skills and acknowledgement of friends.)

Author Background

Ella Mulvey is a teacher and writer from Melbourne. She is a member of Writers Victoria and an alumna of the Faber Academy where she studied Writing for Children under the guidance of Martine Murray. She has a degree in Social Science (Environment) from RMIT University. Ella spent part of her childhood in the desert. Ernabella, or Pukatja, is an Indigenous community 30 km south of the Northern Territory border, and is the inspiration for *The Rabbit-Hole Golf Course*.

Illustrator Background

Karen Briggs is a designer and illustrator whose inspiration stems from her love of animals and nature, and memories of holidays with her grandmother on the Cummeragunja Mission. These days she illustrates from her home in the Adelaide Hills. Her first picture book, *Kick with My Left Foot*, written by Paul Seden, was published in 2014, and shortlisted for the CBCA Crichton Award in 2015. Karen is a descendant of the Yorta Yorta people whose ancestral homeland radiates from the junction of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers in North East Victoria.