

My Deadly Boots

AUTHORS

CARL MERRISON AND HAKEA HUSTLER

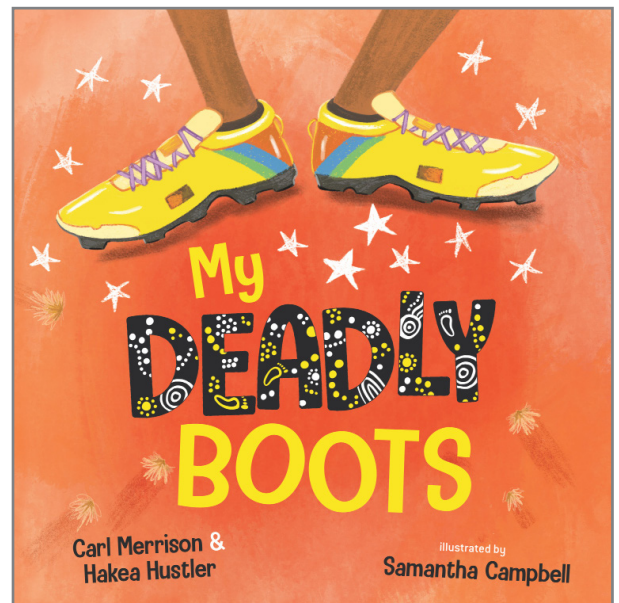
ILLUSTRATOR

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SYNOPSIS

When a young Aboriginal boy finally receives the footy boots he has been saving for, they give him the confidence he needs to face the struggles in his life. He wears them everywhere, showing them off to his friends and family as he goes. But when his boots go missing, his grandfather helps him to realise that there is much more to him than what he wears on his feet—he can draw strength from the support of his family and his connection to culture and Country.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carl Merrison is a respected Jaru/Kija man from the Halls Creek area who came WA runner up Australian of the Year—Local Hero in 2016. He has worked for over ten years alongside Aboriginal youth as a mentor and coach. Carl was the winner of the black&write! Fellowship in 2020. He was also shortlisted for the State Library Western Australia Writer’s Fellowship for his proposal, Kimberley Kickers series.

Hakea Hustler is an experienced teacher who has taught around Australia, including in remote Aboriginal communities. Hakea is committed to Indigenous education with a focus on story as learning and empowerment.

Carl Merrison and Hakea Hustler’s first book, *Black Cockatoo* (Magabala Books), won Honour book in the CBCA Young Reader category.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Samantha Campbell grew up in the Northern Territory and lives in Darwin. She is descended from the Dagoman people from Katherine and as a child lived in remote communities across the Top End. Her first book, *Alfred’s War*, written by Rachel Bin Salleh, was shortlisted for the Premier’s Literary Awards and the Speech Pathology Awards.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF NOTES

Ernest Price is an experienced English teacher who has led English faculties in a range of secondary settings. He has worked with the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, as well as the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English, to develop curriculum and resources for teachers. Ernest has written teachers notes for numerous publications, including *The Hate Race* and *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke. He is the author of a forthcoming novel, to be published in 2024.

STUDY NOTES**BEFORE READING**

- Ask students to bring in an item of clothing that makes them feel confident and powerful. 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 the following:
 - How they came to own the item.
 - How long it has been important to them.
 - The similarities and differences between the items that they each chose. What patterns can they discern?
- 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 behind the uniforms.
- 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 they are 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 students, scaffold a discussion about how these terms are used by different communities.

AFTER READING

- Ask students to share any experience they might have of saving up to buy something for themselves. 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.
- How are the boots 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? Construct a similar description for your own item of clothing, following the pattern used in the text. Share your examples with each other. How do they compare to the original text?
- Look at 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?
- Review each page of writing with the students, focusing on how the boy sees his boots. Create a chart with two rows with the headings 'Description of the boots' and 'Role of the boots' to help students infer the roles that the boots play in creating his sense of self. Put the following in the 'Description of the boots' column and write what the role of the boots played in relation to each description:
 - spikes on the bottom
 - blackfella don't need to be labelled
 - too speedy to lose
 - kick the best torpedo
 - give me confidence
 - walking in two worlds
 - Are there any other descriptions of the boots you can find throughout the story?
- Reread the book with students, focusing on the rhymes that the main character uses to describe his shoes. 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.
- 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?

- 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?
- Ask students to consider where the book might be set. Look at the book's illustrations. What do you notice about the main character's town that is similar, or different, to your own community? For example, you may consider the fact that the boots arrive via plane.
- 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?
- 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?
- 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?
- Look at each of the images of the boots. What do you notice about how the boots appear on the page? Look at a colour wheel and consider whether the illustrations use complementary colours.
- 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?
- Look at the end pages of the book. What do you notice about the motifs included in the images? Pay close attention to the footprints in the images. How do these footprints reflect the boy's journey in the book?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
ERNEST PRICE