

# Etta and the Shadow Taboo

AUTHOR

**J.M. FIELD**

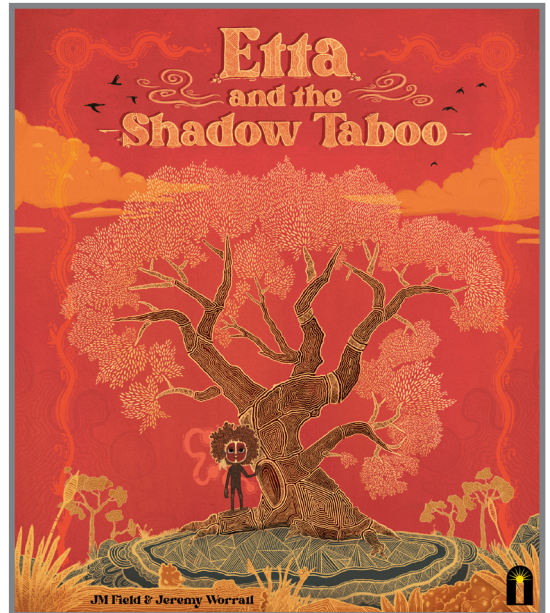
ILLUSTRATOR

**JEREMY WORRALL**

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



## SYNOPSIS

*Where is theirs?*

*And where is mine?*

*To hurt a shadow*

*Is surely a crime*

When Etta steps on Baawaa's (her sister's) shadow, she learns of the Shadow Taboo, and learns to value the personal space of others, as well as her own.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.M. Field grew up on waterfall country, in a small town along the Great Dividing Range on Dharug land. He is, however, a Gamilaraay Guwaymadhaan mari from Moree way, where the red sand meets the black soil. He did his undergraduate studies at the University of Sydney in mathematics and French literature, followed by a doctorate in Mathematical Biology at Balliol College at the University of Oxford. He is still a research mathematician, but fills his spare time writing.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jeremy Worrall is a Ngarabal/Gomerioi multimedia artist. As a young First Nations man, Jeremy specialises in First Nations multimedia, working on a range of government and private projects for community. He is also working on a personal project that explores the visual representation of the Dreamtime and provides a platform for First Nations people to share their stories.

## THEMES

- First Nations Cultural Beliefs
- Body Awareness and Social Distancing

## STUDY NOTES

- This story explores a cultural belief of the Gamilaraay, one of many First Nations peoples. The Shadow Taboo is just one of many beliefs that Gamilaraay people observe. First Nations peoples' beliefs and protocols determine many of their personal interactions with others. Some of these beliefs are referred to as 'Avoidance Practices'. Discuss with students some of the fundamental beliefs and protocols of First Nations peoples, based on careful research.

- J.M. Field, the author, is a Gamilaraay Guwaymadhaan mari from Moree way. Jeremy Worrall, the illustrator, is a Ngarabal/Gomerioi artist. Research their groups, and the various other First Nations peoples and their location on a Map of Indigenous Australia.
- Share First Nations culture with students. Acknowledge key events in the First Nations calendar and invite First Nations writers, artists and musicians to meet students and share their stories:
  - NAIDOC Week will be held 2–9 July 2023 and the theme is ‘For Our Elders’.
  - Indigenous Literacy Day, organised by the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, will be held on 8 September 2023. National Reconciliation Week will be held 27 May to 3 June 2023 (Organised by Reconciliation Australia.)
  - National Sorry Day will be held on 26 May 2023 (Organised by Reconciliation Australia.)
- *Etta and the Shadow Taboo* invites young people to be aware of personal space and to respect their own and other people’s personal space. Discuss the need to respect each other and to be aware of boundaries which people may prefer to establish, depending on their cultural beliefs, or other beliefs or customs. Discuss the concept of personal space and social distancing.
- Rhyme is used throughout this text, for example:
 

‘Baawaa screamed  
Real loud you see  
She said all mean  
Get gone from me!’

Choose a paragraph in this text and write a list of other words which might rhyme. (eg. See/Me + Fee, Tea, Sea, Bee, We.)

- J.M. Field has ‘included three very important Gamilaraay words: yaama, Gunii (the ‘Gun’ of Gunii is pronounced somewhere between ‘goon’ and ‘gun’) and Baawaa. They mean, in turn: hello, Mum or Auntie (but only on your mum’s side), and older sister—First Nations’ kinship terms are much more nuanced than English.’ Discuss Aboriginal languages with students. The Indigenous Literacy Foundation has many programs that address the need to preserve Aboriginal languages and has published picture books in those languages. Read some of these texts.
- This might be described as a cautionary tale. Etta learns a valuable lesson when she makes the mistake of stepping on Baawaa’s shadow and is told by the Spirit Tree what she has done wrong. Write a cautionary tale based on a lesson you have learned about morals or good behaviour.
- In your own words describe the ‘Shadow Taboo’ and why it is important to First Nations peoples.
- Study the patterns woven into Jeremy Worrall’s artwork, which is intricate and varied. Observe, for example, the patterns on the trunk of the spirit tree (pp 4–5) or the patterns which decorate Baawaa’s clothing (p 6) or the patterns revealed in the aerial view of the land (pp 24–5). What did you notice about the patterns employed?
- Read other First Nations picture books and examine the style of patterns the illustrators employ in their art. Bronwyn Bancroft’s *Patterns of Australia* (2018) would be a useful text to examine.
- Discuss perspective and how an image might be viewed from a variety of perspectives. For example, the aerial view on pp 24–25 is taken from Etta’s view flying above the landscape; on pp 28–29, Etta is viewed in a close-up as if she’s looking at a camera.
- Identify the following throughout the text:
  - the animals and birds
  - the plants.
- Discuss shadows with students. Make simple Hand Shadows using a light screen.
- Make Shadow Art Drawings with students.
- Make Shadow Puppets using a stick or skewer, glue and some heavy craft papers.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT**