

Tamarra: A Story of Termites on Gurindji Country

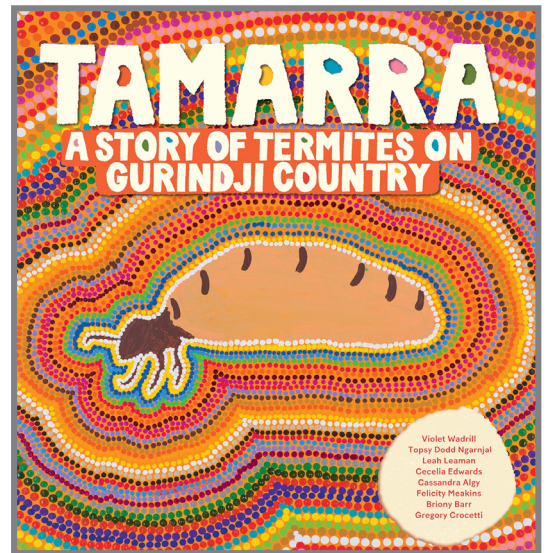
CREATORS

Violet Wadrill, Topsy Dodd Ngarnjal, Leah Leaman, Cecelia Edwards, Cassandra Algy, Felicity Meakins, Briony Barr and Gregory Crocetti

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Primary



SYNOPSIS

Tamarra: A Story of Termites on Gurindji Country is a fascinating book that takes readers inside the life of termites through Indigenous Knowledge, Western Science, storytelling and art.

Created as a collaboration between over 30 First Nations and non-Indigenous contributors, the story and artworks explore how termites and their mounds connect different parts of Country, from tiny Gurindji babies and their loving grandmothers, to spiky spinifex grasses growing in the hot sun.

Written in traditional Gurindji, Gurindji Kriol and English (with a QR code linked to the audio), *Tamarra* is a truly original story with beautiful artwork that takes readers on an educational and cultural journey through Gurindji Country.

ABOUT THE CREATORS

The co-creators of *Tamarra* are a diverse group of Gurindji and non-Indigenous people. For over four months in 2021, they came together at Kalkaringi (NT) on Gurindji Country to explore a shared interest in termites and with a curiosity about how they could create a new kind of storybook together.

The Gurindji artists and storytellers who led the project are Violet Wadrill, Topsy Dodd Ngarnjal and Leah Leaman. They are cultural custodians and members of Karungkarni Art, which is the local arts centre. Gurindji students from Kalkaringi School participated through workshops and art-making. Key non-Indigenous contributors were language workers Cecelia Edwards and Cassandra Algy, linguist Professor Felicity Meakins, who has worked with the Gurindji community for over twenty years, and artist Briony Barr and microbiologist Dr Gregory Crocetti, who collaborate as Scale Free Network.

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Looking at the title and cover artwork, what do you think this book is about?
- What do you already know about termites?
- What do you already know about bush medicine or bush foods?
- Where do you think Gurindji Country might be?
- Do you know what the name of the Country your school is located on?

AFTER READING

- Hand students a piece of paper and ask them to write at least one question, interest or feeling in response to the story. Place these anonymously into a box and use these as prompts for discussion after you have read the story.
- How do you think differently about termites after reading this book?
- Where is Gurindji Country? Can you find Kalkarindji on a map?
- What are two different ways Gurindji People use termites and termite mounds?
- What are two different uses of plants by Gurindji People?
- The language Gurindji is one of around 400 First Nations languages. You can practise pronouncing these words using the audio on the website. Can you find the Gurindji words for:
 - 'termite mound' on p 8
 - 'fire' on p 16
 - 'child' or 'baby' on p 19 and p 72
- The language Gurindji Kriol is one of Australia's newest languages. It was included in the Australian census for the first time in 2011. The language evolved on cattle stations over the last 40 years from traditional Gurindji mixing with a Pidgin English now known as Kriol. Some of the Gurindji Kriol words used in *Tamarra* contain English-sounding words which are from Kriol. How many can you find? Can you find the Kriol words for:
 - 'family' on p 48
 - 'rain' on p 63
 - 'Country' on p 68
- Why do you think the creators decided to write some sections of the story in traditional Gurindji and other sections in Gurindji Kriol?
- The guts of all animals (including humans) contain hundreds of different kinds of bacteria and other microbes: Read pp 51–57 and ask students how bacteria living in termite guts help them to live and survive.
 - How do they think the trillions of bacteria living in our own gut (ie. our large intestine) help humans?
 - Like termites, bacteria are often assumed to be bad and described as 'germs', even though most of them are good. Has this book made you think differently about good and bad germs?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Find out the name of the Country where your school or home is located. What can you find out about how local First Nations people have traditionally used native plants and insects on this Country. Write a report (this could also be a video, podcast, poster, etc.) about what you discover. If there is not enough information about First Nations people in your local area then try researching other nearby groups.
- Ask students to imagine they are one of the termites and write a short story about a day or a week in the life of that termite. Use emotive language to convey how the characters might be feeling and behaving, as if they were able to have feelings and behave in a similar way to humans.
 - Are they a hard worker or a brave defender?
 - Are they the huge queen, laying eggs every few seconds and too big to leave her royal chamber?
 - Who are their friends?
 - What adventures might they go on and what challenges might they face?
 - Remember, the workers and defender termites are deaf and blind, and must rely on vibrations and smells to navigate and stay away from danger!
- Most people think all termites are a pest insect that must be exterminated, mostly because of the damage some wood-eating termites do to timber homes. We have now learned that not all termites eat wood and can play an important environmental and cultural role. Ask students to imagine what kinds of problems would occur if all termites were removed.
 - Write a letter from spinifex termites trying to persuade people not to remove them.
- After watching the video 'Termites Digest Wood Thanks To Microbes', ask students to write a story from the perspective of a bacterium living in a termite gut. What might it feel like to live in a termite gut? What happens when the termite you are living in poops and you get eaten by another termite?

- Ask students to write a review about *Tamarra: A Story of Termites on Gurindji Country*, or to make a podcast recording recounting the story. This might also work as an oral presentation to the class supported by an illustrated poster.
- Ask students to write a short research report based on termites. This could involve the cultural significance of termites as a food source in different parts of the world, the difference types and diets of termites around the world or different folktales or creation stories from around the world that feature termites.
- Create a diagram depicting the timeline of the Gurindji People's experiences with kartiya (non-Indigenous people) in Australia, leading up to the present. Find images to help visualise the timeline and add photographs and drawings to help illustrate it.
- Make sculptures of termites using plasticine or clay. Try using tiny sticks to create legs and antennae. You could make examples of all the main termites in a family (king, queen, defender, worker, alate). What other materials can you use to sculpt a termite? Expand on the termite sculpture activity by making a diorama featuring other parts of the ecosystem on Gurindji Country such as spinifex plants, eucalypt trees, rocks and other animals such as echidna, lizards and different birds.
- Research the weather patterns in the Northern Territory, in and around towns of Kalkaringi and Daguragu. Make an artwork inspired by what you find. It could be about the colours of the different seasons, changing temperatures over the year, winds and where they come from, storm clouds or rain fall.
- Draw and design your own life-size termite mound: The mounds of spinifex termites can contain a million termites! Encourage them to think about the layout of the colony and how it might be designed to suit the needs of the termites, adding in chambers for the different types of termites and their various activities (eg. storing food and water, feeding, cleaning, laying eggs, nurseries for young, etc.) together with tunnels to nearby habitats (eg. spinifex grasses). Work together to draw lots and lots of termites everywhere. Students could also then attempt to build a mound using materials such as cardboard tubes, egg cartons, popsicle sticks and glue.
- Create your own picture book: In groups of two, ask students to write and illustrate a picture book, imagined from the perspective of a worker termite (eg. collecting food, gathering water, building tunnels, repairing the mound, feeding other termites, etc). Students could work together to write the story and illustrate it, or one student writes and the other illustrates. Encourage students to think about different mediums when creating the pictures for their book. They can use pencils, felt tip pens, crayons, paint, collage or a mix of all mediums.
- Ask students to choose a termite predator they might like to research. Typical predators of spinifex termites include ants, lizards, frogs, birds, spiders, bilbies and echidna. Students should then create a presentation on their chosen animal. This can be a poster, a series of illustrations, or collages of images students have cut and pasted to a poster, a written journal or a podcast. They should consider questions such as:
 - When did this animal evolve?
 - How is it classified?
 - What can you find out about its anatomy?
 - What is the main habitat for this animal? Do they migrate?
 - What is their life cycle or breeding cycles?
 - What is their position in food chain?
 - Are termites an important part of their diet?
 - Is the animal threatened by any human activity (eg. land clearing, cattle grazing) or other threats (eg. disease, or feral predators like cats) and are there any conservation efforts to maintain numbers of this animal in the wild?
- Ask students to work in groups to create a diagram depicting the food web around a termite mound, including termites, ants, spiders, frogs, lizards, birds and mammals. Students can present this diagram as a poster containing a collage of images or a series of illustrations. (This could also be a group activity led by the teacher). Ask students to consider what might happen if one or more parts of this food web disappeared.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

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