

Country Town

AUTHORS

ISOLDE MARTYN AND ROBYN RIDGEWAY

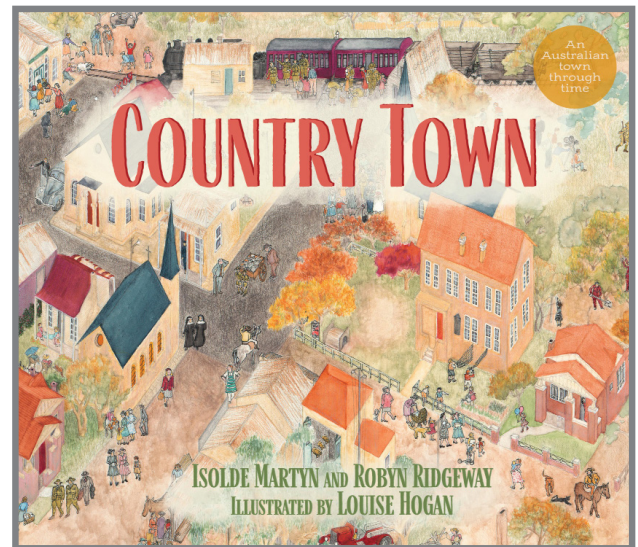
ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Happy times, sad times, boom times and gloom times!

From the First Peoples camp at the river crossing in the 1820s through to Carols by Candlelight at the showground in today's world, this is a decade by decade wonderfully illustrated story of a small country community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Isolde Martyn and Robyn Ridgeway co-authored *Country Town*, each providing a unique perspective of Australian history.

Isolde Martyn's earlier career was in academia and publishing. She has edited local histories, researched every town in Australia for the Bicentenary volume *Events and Places* and she was the editor of *The Reader's Digest Motoring Guide to Australia*. She is also the author of nine historical novels and her debut novel won a top award in the USA and Australia. *Country Town* has been a long-term project and she hopes it encourages young readers and their families to enjoy history in a really fun way.

Robyn's ancestry is from the NSW North coast. Her mother was a Thungutti woman, her father a Worimi man. Robyn teaches Aboriginal Studies at both a Diploma and HSC level for TAFE. She is involved with several Aboriginal Committees with TAFE as well as the local Community.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Louise Hogan is best known for *When a Goose meets a Moose* and *Apples for Hurricane Street*, which was shortlisted for the Australian Children's Book of the Year Award. Although she graduated from the National Art School with a Diploma in Interior Design, illustrating children's books was her real ambition. She even worked at Taronga Zoo art department in order to practise drawing animals. Louise has also done school visits to talk about her books.

STUDY NOTES

- Introduce the text by reading the first page 'Which Town Is This?' as a class to provide context. Show students what the pages look like, in terms of having a descriptive illustration and either a fictional story, or factual information.
- In groups, ask the students to pick a section of the story and get them to summarise that section. Then ask them to share their summary with the other students who have summarised other pages.

- Before starting, complete an example as a class using the first page 'River Camp 1822'. Read the text and show the illustration and invite students to suggest important details to include in a summary.

Example summary: This page is told from an Indigenous child's perspective, as he talks about his connection with the land and his culture. He talks about Old Uncle telling stories about the past and teaching the next generation how to take care of the land. He talks about how he is scared that change is coming and how he will no longer be free. The image shows a peaceful place with people hunting, gathering, living in huts, canoeing and playing.

- There are 14 'event' pages in the text. If you use the below guide, each student will have three event pages to summarise. Students can summarise the pages in a group with other students summarising the same pages, or they can complete this task individually. Give students the remainder of the lesson to read their allocated pages to form a summary that includes four main events or facts of each page. It would be helpful to photocopy the pages relevant for each student so they can highlight the text. Suggested page allocations:
 - **Group A**
 - The Coming of Strangers 1833
 - Gloom Time 1893
 - The Queen's Visit 1954
 - **Group B**
 - First European Settlement 1843
 - The Town Gets a Railway 1905
 - Show Day 1969
 - **Group C**
 - Gold Rush 1855
 - 1918 Armistice Night – The War is Over
 - Bushfire Summer 1983
 - **Group D**
 - Boom Time 1866
 - The Great Depression
 - Christmas Time 2018
 - **Group E**
 - Flood 1870
 - Wartime 1939-45

Next lesson, students will join a new group to share their summaries. The new groups should contain one student from each previous group so they are all sharing summaries on different pages. Give groups time to go through the 14 pages in historical order, with each student sharing the summary that they wrote for their allocated page.

- Revise the different reasons an author may write a book; to entertain, inform or persuade. Ask students to think about an example of a text from each category. Then pose the question; what was the author's purpose for this text? Allow students time to debate with others that think differently. Encourage students to use evidence from the text in their argument.
- Can you tell a story without using any words? Let the students discuss before reading *Window* by Jeanie Baker. The discuss the following questions:
 - What did the students notice?
 - What was the story about?
 - How is this book similar and different to *Country Town*? Give students time to discuss amongst themselves. Take a few answers and model how to put them into a Venn diagram on the board. *Window* on one side, *Country Town* on the other, with the similarities in the cross section.
- Go back in time with your students. You can either prepare information beforehand, let the students research set questions, or even have guests come in to speak about milestones they have witnessed in the history of the suburb. Ensure you learn which Indigenous land the school is built on and the name of the people who live/lived on the land. Engage students in a discussion using the following questions:

- Do they know anyone who was in this classroom last year?
- What about the year before?
- 10 years ago?
- Before this classroom was here, what did it look like?
- What did this very spot look like before the school was here?
- What about before the suburb was here?
- What about before British Colonists were here?
- Go for a walk around the school, looking for ways that natural resources are being utilised. You might see trees being used for shade, a cubby house made out of branches, a vegetable patch, birds maintaining the grass. When you get back to the classroom ask students if they could live off the land the school is located on. Why? Why not?
- Together, look at the first image in the book and ask if the students can identify all the different ways the Indigenous people are living off the land's natural resources.
- Pose questions to students and ask them to provide a written response, then give them time to share in pairs, small groups or together as a class.
 - If European settlers hadn't arrived on this land, would it look any different over time?
 - Why do you think British settlers chose to place a town on this land?
 - In the images we see many trees being cut down. What do you think the effect of that is?
 - Do you think the land could ever go back to how it was at the start of the book?
- Most of the history we know is written from a European perspective, and it is only recently that we have realised how important it is to hear Australian history from First Nations people. Discuss the below passages from various European explorer/settler's journals. Challenge students to re-write a journal entry of each event from an Indigenous perspective.

Explorers Hovell and Hume tell of meeting a group of women and children:

The children were engaged in play, throwing small spears, formed of reeds, at a circular piece of bark, about a foot in diameter, while it was rolling along the ground; and the women were employed in spinning the native flax, one of whom, (an old woman,) gave immediate notice of their approach, crying out white man! white man! minija! minija! which in the language of the natives of the Murrumbidgee, would imply "make haste, make haste" when the whole party rose, and in a few minutes disappeared.

23rd August, 1770 Captain Cook's Journal:

From what I have said of the Natives of New Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary conveniencies so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturb'd by the Inequality of the Condition