

The Wonder of Little Things: Young Readers Edition

AUTHORS

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SCIS: 5478017

ISBN: 9780733342462

RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Primary/Lower Secondary



SYNOPSIS

A First Nations Elder shares his extraordinary story of finding kindness in the midst of prejudice, and joy in living life to the full.

Welcome to my story.

I didn't learn a lot in school, not in the classroom, anyway. But I learned a lot from life.

'Always remember you're as good as anybody else,' Vince's mother, Kate, often told him. And he was, becoming a champion footballer and premiership-winning coach. But change was in the air, and Vince wanted to help make life better for his people too.

At every step, Vince found light in the darkness, the friendly face in the crowd, the small moments that make the world go 'round.

Welcome to the wonder of little things.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vince Copley AM, a proud Ngadjuri man, was born on an Aboriginal mission in South Australia. As a young boy he attended the St Francis House in Adelaide, a home for First Nations boys that produced many future leaders, including civil rights activist Charlie Perkins. A star footballer and cricketer, Vince later devoted his life to advancing the rights and improving the lives of First Nations people. He worked closely with Charlie, and with everyone from community leaders to premiers and prime ministers. Along with other Ngadjuri people, he was also active in recovering and protecting Ngadjuri cultural heritage. Vince died in 2022, aged eighty-five.

Lea McInerney grew up on Ngadjuri Country, in the Clare Valley. Her ancestry is Irish-Australian. Lea's writing has been published in Griffith Review and other literary magazines. Lea met Vince in 2016. As well as this book, she worked with Vince on several Ngadjuri projects he led, and she continues this work with his family.

THEMES

- Family
- Identity

- Discrimination
- Resilience

STUDY NOTES

BEFORE READING

- Prior to reading the book have students set up a reading journal using the following framework:

| Chapter | Key events in Vince's life | Locations | What did you learn about <u>Aboriginal</u> culture? | What did you learn about <u>Australian</u> history? | Questions this chapter left you with |
|--------------|----------------------------|-----------|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| Ch. 1 | | | | | |
| Ch. 2 | | | | | |
| Ch. 3 (etc.) | | | | | |

After reading each chapter, students should add a series of dot points to their reading journal using these headings.

- At the conclusion of the book, students should review the 'Questions' column on the far right. They can answer any questions that were addressed within the book as they continued reading. With the remaining questions, students should select five from their list and conduct a self-directed investigation to have these questions answered. Some of the questions may be answered through research, others may require a different method of problem-solving.
- Once students have found the answers to their five questions, these can be shared within the class as a whole-class or small-group discussion, or could be displayed on posters in the classroom.

WHILE READING

Voice and Style

- What do you learn about Vince Copley in the prologue?
- What words would you use to describe his voice?
- What tone is established in the prologue?
 - Does this continue throughout the book, or does it shift at times. Use textual evidence to support your response.
- This book was written by Vince Copley, in collaboration with his friend Lea McInerney. How do you think this collaborative approach may have impacted the creation of the book?

Setting

- What does the reader learn about Point Pearce in Chapter Two?
 - Using the description from this chapter, create a visual representation of Point Pearce.
 - What do you think it might have been like to live on a mission like Point Pearce?
- Vince says, 'One time we'd been to Adelaide and we had the baby with us. We were in Allan's old ute and it was stinking hot. On the way home the ute broke down just outside of Copley, which in those days was south of Leigh Creek, before they moved the town in the 1980s.' (pp 57–58)
 - Have you ever heard of a whole town being moved?
 - Why do you think they might have done that?
 - What effect might it have had on people living there?
 - How might it affect the environment?
- Using the 'locations' column from your reading journal, create a map that identifies the key places of significance in Vince's life.

People

- Mind map Vince's family members as we are introduced to them in the prologue. Add to this mind map as the book progresses, including Vince's family, his friends and key mentors. This can be completed as an ongoing activity in pairs or small groups.
- Select one of these people who Vince met:

- Charlie Perkins
- John Moriarty
- David Gulpilil
- Gordon Briscoe
- Mandawuy Yunupingu.

Write a short biography of this person, noting their language group and Country, key events from their childhood and adolescence, achievements and awards, and any other interesting information you learn about them.

History

- Consider the aspects of Australian history Vince Copley refers to, and the impact of these racist government policies on Vince and his family. Select one of the topics below:
 - Chief Protector of Aborigines (Chapter 2)
 - Exemptions (Chapter 3 pp 29–30)
 - The classification of Aboriginal people (Chapter 6 pp 66–67)
 - Summary Offences Act of South Australia (Chapter 14 & Chapter 19)
 - Assimilation (Chapter 18 p 204)

Revisit the portion(s) of the text where this policy is addressed and answer the following questions:

- What is the policy intended to do? (Conduct additional research as needed.)
- What impact did this have on Vince and his family and friends?
- What have you learned about Australian history that you weren't previously aware of?

Racism

- In Chapter Seven, Vince talks about how it was hard in the 1940s for young Aboriginal people to get a good education. Why do you think that might have been?
 - How do you think the mums of Vince and the other boys might have felt about having to send their sons to Adelaide for them to be able to go to school?
 - How might the difficulty young First Nations people had in obtaining an education have an ongoing impact today?
- Vince's wife Brenda has a Welsh-Australian background. Vince writes about what a strong woman she was and how she knew her own mind. In Chapter Twenty-One he tells a story of how she's shopping with her Aboriginal friend Colleen, and Colleen is treated very rudely. Answer the following questions about this chapter:
 - What do you think of the way Brenda responded to this?
 - How do you think it might have felt for Colleen to be treated like this?
 - What do you think about Brenda's decision to ask Colleen to be her bridesmaid?
- Using notes from your reading journal, consider how Vince was impacted by racism throughout his life. Find four examples of racism in the text and address the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - How did Vince respond?
 - How did the people around him respond?
 - Select a quote from the text that reflects this experience.

Friendship

- In Chapter Nine, Vince says 'These kids were my best mates and my family . . . All the boys had the same feeling about each other. It started at the home and stayed all of our lives.' (p 101) What ongoing impact did these friendships have on Vince's life?
- What are some of the key experiences he shared with this group of friends after their days at St Francis had ended?
- Why do you think these friendships endured? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

- What does Vince say about the concept of learning? (p 4)
- What are some of the differences between the Western and Aboriginal belief systems explored here? (pp 24–26)
- What is an exemption? (p 22)

- Why was Vince’s mum’s relationship with Allan controversial? (pp 44–45)
- What is the significance of the family connections made during this time? (Chapter 5)
- Why does Vince’s mum tell him ‘You’re as good as anybody else’? (p 67)
- How does Vince meet Charlie and Ernie Perkins? (p 76)
- Why did the parents at Ethelton protest? (p 84)
- What is tuberculosis and what is polio? (Chapter 9) How was Vince impacted by these two diseases?
- How are the factors leading up to Vince starting to play football at Port Adelaide beginning to be seen in Chapter Ten?
- Why is Chapter Eleven chapter called ‘A Different Sort of Family’?
- How did Mr Vickery show empathy and compassion to Vince in Chapter Twelve?
- Why did Vince feel ‘all alone’ despite his achievement in Chapter Thirteen?
- How did football continue to play a big part in Vince’s life?
- How was Vince shown hospitality in this new town? What impact did this have on him as a young man?
- Who was Sir Doug Nicholls? Conduct some brief research.
- How does Vince come to be the coach in Chapter Seventenn?
- Describe the social dances that were popular with young people in this era. (Chapter 17)
 - What did Vince enjoy about these dances?
- How are anger, racism and football connected? (pp 211–214)
- What was the 1967 referendum for? What was the outcome? (Chapter 20)
- In Chapter 21, what joke did Brenda’s dad and brother play on Vince?
- What did Brenda find confronting about the early days living in Adelaide after she and Vince were married?
- What did David Gulpilil say to Brenda that shocked and surprised her?
- Why was Vince saddened by the embargo?
- How many boys went through St Francis and which years was it in operation?
- What does Vince mean when he says, ‘I’m pinning my faith on young people...’? (Chapter 26)

Activities

- Vince talks about the town of Yirrkala, on Yolngu Country, and the bark petitions that Yolngu leaders gave to the government in 1963 (p 248). See what you can find out about the Yirrkala bark petitions, as well as photos of them. They look very different to the usual petitions that people send to parliament when they’re seeking action from the government about something that matters to them. Why do you think the Yolngu people chose to present their petitions in this way?
 - Find images of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. How and why do you think this document may have been influenced by the Yirrkala bark petitions?
- Towards the end of the book, Vince reflects on how he wishes that when he was younger he’d spent more time with his aunties, especially his dad’s sisters. He felt very loved by them as a child but didn’t see much of them when he was a young man. By the time he thought to talk to them to learn more about his dad, who had died when Vince was one year old, his aunties had all passed away. Is there anyone in your family or wider community who you’d like to talk with to learn more about your own history or stories? If so, what would you like to ask them about?
 - If you decided to ask them if they’d answer some of your questions, how might you go about it?
- Vince was in his eighties when he told his stories to his friend Lea for this book. Towards the end of the book, he talks about all the little things in his life that he appreciated, and how they all added up to make his life wonderful. After finishing *The Wonder of Little Things YRE*, how have you reflected on the ‘little things’ that make you happy?
 - What are some of the little things in life that you find wonderful?
 - As a class, brainstorm all of the little things that make you feel good. Come up with a way to celebrate these things; for example, posters, short stories, letters or collages.

AUTHORS OF NOTES

CASEY MULDER AND LEA MCINERNEY