

First Knowledges for Younger Readers: Design & Building on Country

AUTHORS

ALISON PAGE AND PAUL MEMMOTT

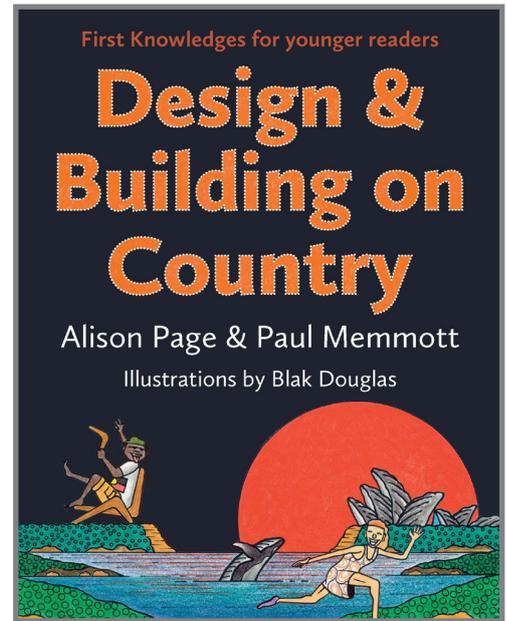
ILLUSTRATOR

BLAK DOUGLAS

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

Design & Building on Country shares thousands of years of First Nations history and culture, highlighting for young readers what Country has offered generations of First Nations people and continues to offer in all aspects of life.

This book offers a journey through the generous storytelling of First Nations people, to share how they cared for and worked with Country to live in harmony. Aboriginal people were the first cooks, engineers and designers of this vast continent and this book shares how they designed and built in their environment, from fish traps to ovens, from homes to fashion.

Readers will learn how Aboriginal peoples' cultures and ancient knowledges can be used today and into the future to create a better, healthier global community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alison Page is a descendant of the Walbanga and Wadi Wadi people of the Tharawal and Yuin nations and an award-winning artist whose work over twenty-five years promotes the creative expression of Aboriginal identity in public art, design and film. In 2015, Alison was inducted into the Design Institute of Australia's Hall of Fame. She appeared for eight years as a regular panelist on the ABC TV show *The New Inventors* and was the founder of Saltwater Freshwater Arts Alliance and the National Aboriginal Design Agency. Alison is an Associate Dean at the University of Technology, Sydney, a Councillor for the Australian National Maritime Museum and a Director with the National Australia Day Council.

Paul Memmott is a descendant of Scottish potters and painters. He has had a fifty-year life-experience and career working as an architect, anthropologist and agent for change with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. He is a transdisciplinary researcher based at University of Queensland, recognising the need to join with Indigenous communities and organisations to bring transformative approaches to improving quality of lifestyle and wellbeing in the face of longitudinal disadvantage and the endeavour for self-determination. One of his books, *Gunyah, Goondie + Wurley: The Aboriginal Architecture of Australia*, won three national book awards.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Blak Douglas is a modern artist with proud Dhungutti Aboriginal origins. His works are culturally and politically charged with a sense of irony, parody and truth. Blak is a trained illustrator, designer and a self-taught painter. He won the 2018 Kilgour Prize, the 2020 STILL award and the 2022 Archibald Prize. His works are collected by the National Gallery

of Australia, the Art Gallery of NSW, QAGOMA, the Australian National Maritime Museum, the National Museum of Australia, AIATSIS and other galleries in Australia and abroad.

THEMES

- First Nations
- Country
- Culture
- History
- Design
- Connection
- Sustainability
- Nature
- Australia
- Building

STUDY NOTES

- Before opening the book, reflecting on the title itself, what do you think you will be learning from this book?

CHAPTER ONE: OBJECTS AND COUNTRY

- In your own words, explain how First Nations people are connected to Country and what Country means to them.
- Does your classroom have the map of all the Aboriginal Nations throughout Australia? Put one up if you don't. Find out what Country your school is built on and research how you can take responsibility as a class to care for Country.
- How are you connected to Country? You can strengthen your own connection by going and sitting on Country. Close your eyes or bow your head, listen to and feel what Country is telling you.
- Invite a local Elder or respected community member to share the local creation and Dreaming stories with your class or school.

CHAPTER TWO: FIRST NATIONS' MATERIALS AND SPIRITUALITY

- Share what you know about lifecycles as a class in a yarnning circle.
 - How can natural objects on Country used for shelters, food, string and ropes, tools and medicines have a lifecycle too?
- For thousands and thousands of years, Aboriginal people have practiced sustainability when caring for Country. How can you best practice sustainability in your school? Research ways you can improve sustainability in your school and classrooms.
- What are your local First Nations seasons? Learn and celebrate them throughout the year. Think about what Country is telling you through the year.
- Traditional Aboriginal housing designs, using bark and spinifex, were so effective they were used by some colonists. In a yarnning circle discuss your thoughts on the 'Organic Hardware store' (p 30). How could we benefit from one of these today?
- Learn more about the Lardil people from Wellesley Island. Share their skills and story with your school community.

CHAPTER THREE: TOOLS FOR LIVING ON COUNTRY

- The kinship systems of Aboriginal people are complex and mathematical. Here is a guide to help explain Aboriginal kinship systems: <<https://www.watarrkafoundation.org.au/blog/the-role-of-family-kinship-in-aboriginal-culture>>.
- Share the differences between western and Aboriginal kinship systems, highlighting how objects and Country are a part of Aboriginal kinship systems.
- Trade routes along the Songlines of Aboriginal people have been active for thousands and thousands of years. Highlight the different trade stories in Chapter Three with your class using a First Nations map. Can you find more

trade routes and stories to mark on your class map?

- What benefits did colonisers' new tools and materials bring to Aboriginal people and how and why did they adapt them? In what way have these materials damaged Country and the culture of Aboriginal people and all Australians today? Brainstorm what can be done with modern materials instead of throwing them away into landfill.
- Research how communities around Australia are bringing objects and people home to Country through repatriation programs. Highlight a story that resonates with you to share with your year level or school community.

CHAPTER 4: KITCHEN ON COUNTRY

- What is the difference between Dreaming and Dreamtime? Learn more about how Dreaming and Dreamtime stories help Aboriginal people in their daily lives: <theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833>.
- What are some local bush foods that grow on the Country your school is built on?
 - Can you grow an indigenous garden to share with your school community or in your canteen?
- Message sticks carried the information to other Nations that a ceremony or feast was to take place and when to come. Explore message sticks further and learn their importance. You may choose to send one to another class.
- Explore the UNESCO World heritage listed Budj Bim traps of the Gunditjmara people and how they would prepare for the cold winters ahead by storing food: <nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/budj-bim-cultural-landscape>.
- Learn how Aboriginal people grind seeds and prepare the bread for the community. Use this information to cook some damper from scratch.

CHAPTER 5: THE FIRST ENGINEERS ON COUNTRY

- The returning boomerang is known as the world's earliest aerofoil. What is an aerofoil?
 - Make an aerofoil with your class to learn the science behind the boomerang: Visit the following website as a guide <youtube.com/watch?v=SDwBgm2DQN0>.
- Invite an Aboriginal community member, who can throw a boomerang, to your school to demonstrate the science behind boomerangs firsthand. See if they have any tips!
- Sustainability and regeneration of land was essential for Aboriginal landcare systems so species could remain healthy and plentiful for thousands of years. This often involved reconstructing the landscape. Explore examples, such as the Wellesley Island rock walls that were used to trap fish.
- Nets have been utilised by Aboriginal people for thousands and thousands of years. Create dioramas showcasing the different uses of nets and other technologies to collect and capture food: <aiatsis.gov.au/explore/fishing>.

CHAPTER 6: SETTING UP ON CAMP

- Setting up a camp depended on the part of Country Aboriginal people were camping on. Camps had sophisticated layouts so everyone knew their relationship to other people and felt safe. Create a map for a school campsite that would make everyone feel that same way.
- How do wind breaks protect people when they are built on a campsite? What are some examples of windbreaks in modern architecture?
- Learn more about the science behind windbreaks. You might try to build mini windbreaks out of local materials to test them. From the knowledge you gained testing your mini windbreaks, build a large-scale windbreak in your school yard that would keep you safe from the elements.

CHAPTER 7: BUILDING A SHELTER

- Investigate different shelters and why they were used by Aboriginal people before and during colonisation, then create a display for others to learn about the sophisticated technology used.
- Aboriginal people have long understood the benefits of many plants and fibres. Today, modern society is starting to realise the worth in this knowledge and spinifex grass is beginning to be used in medical gels. Investigate this further with your class: <abc.net.au/news/2023-03-08/spinifex-grass-could-treat-arthritis-create-indigenous-jobs/102050068>.

- Look at the illustration on pp 106–7 of the family living in the spinifex home. Think about the ideas you might previously have had about how some Aboriginal people lived prior to colonisation. What has changed in your mind?
- Re-read the quote from Captain Cook on pp 108–9 about Aboriginal people being the happiest people he had ever witnessed because the land and sea provided everything they would ever need. How does that make you feel about how Aboriginal people and Country have been treated, from colonisation until now?

CHAPTER 8: ABORIGINAL ARCHITECTURE TODAY

- Why do you think it is important to celebrate the stories of the old people that walked before us? Think of some questions you'd like to ask an older person in your community.
- Do you think Barangaroo would be proud of the suburb being named after her? Research Barangaroo and then write a poem celebrating her and the plight of her people and Country.
- Do you like it when people listen to your needs, desires and dreams? Alison's story of the hospital built in Wilcannia on p 123 is a solid example of what listening and bringing together traditional knowledges and Western technology can do for a community. Write a reflection of how you felt learning about these changes and another situation where it could be applied.

CHAPTER 9: DESIGN FUTURES

- Celebrating Aboriginal peoples' culture and connection to Country has not always been the way. Have you seen any examples recently that lift and celebrate artists in your community?
- How would you like to see Country and Aboriginal culture celebrated in your classroom or at home? What First Nations design or products would you like to see in the future?
- What would you share from this book with your family and community to ensure we have a future full of connection to the oldest living surviving culture in the world?

AUTHOR OF NOTES
SHELLEY WARE