

# How Big is Love?

AUTHORS

**CARL MERRISON AND HAKEA HUSTLER**

ILLUSTRATOR

**JADE GOODWIN**

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## SYNOPSIS

*'My love stretches back to Creation and forward to the end of time.  
I loved you then, I love you now, I'll love you always.'*

After a long day, a young child and older family member sit on the porch at sunset watching a storm roll in. The adult whispers 'I love you' but the child needs reassurance: 'How much?' With each new declaration, we learn that the love between adult and child is boundless.

The love between two family members takes us on a journey from their small backyard, across Country, to the end of time—because sometimes we need to hear all the ways we are loved.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Author Carl Merrison is a respected Jaru/Kija man from the Halls Creek area who came WA runner up Australian of the Year—Local Hero in 2016. He has worked for over ten years alongside Aboriginal youth as a mentor and coach. Carl was the winner of the black&write! Fellowship in 2020 for his young readers' series Backyard Sports, and his debut picture book, *My Deadly Boots*, was shortlisted in the Queensland Literary Awards 2023 and the Speech Pathology Book of the Year Awards 2023.

Author Hakea Hustler is an experienced teacher who has taught around Australia, including in remote Aboriginal communities. Hakea is committed to Indigenous education with a focus on story as learning and empowerment.

Carl Merrison and Hakea Hustler's first book, *Black Cockatoo* (Magabala Books), won Honour book in the CBCA Young Reader category.

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jade Goodwin is a First Nations illustrator based in Australia. Jade's creative journey began at an early age in her grandparents' screen printing studio, where she would spend an endless amounts of time crafting anything she could from studio supplies. Her passion for creativity and illustration grew over time, eventually leading to a successful career in the children's publishing industry. Building on her debut publishing contract in 2021, Jade has expanded her portfolio by signing contracts for another 21 books. Jade loves bringing imagination to life through her sweet and bright illustrations and hopes to inspire children and adults alike.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Cara Shipp is a Wiradjuri/Welsh woman (descending from the Lamb and Shipp families in Central Western NSW, around Dubbo, Parkes and Trangi) and recently Head of Senior School at Silkwood School on the Gold Coast. As part of the Big Picture Learning Australia network of schools, Cara is now a National School Coach at Silkwood School and other schools across SE QLD and Northern NSW, leading professional development for teachers in this network. Cara has previously run alternative educational programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; held Head Teacher English/HASS/Languages positions; and served as President, Vice President and Editor with the ACT Association for the Teaching of English (ACTATE). She is currently the National Fellow with the Australian Association for the Teaching of English. Cara is an Alumnus and trained facilitator of the Stronger Smarter Leadership Program. Cara completed a Master of Education focusing on Aboriginal literacy and regularly presents cultural competence training at local and national conferences, particularly within the context of incorporating First Nations perspectives into the English curriculum. Her recent AATE publication, *Listening from the Heart: re-writing the teaching of English with First Nations voices*, documents this work. Cara writes teachers' notes for a range of First Nations authors and publishers and she has a blog on Aboriginal perspectives in English teaching at <https://missshipp.wordpress.com/>.

## STUDY NOTES

### BEFORE READING

- Discuss the features of the book cover, front and back:
  - What could the swirls and clouds be signalling?
  - What do you notice about the firefly?
  - Is it nighttime or daytime?
  - What are the characters doing?
  - What expressions are on the characters' faces? What do you think they are feeling?
  - How would you describe the colours? How do they make you feel when you look at them? Are they calming, warm, comforting, exciting?
  - What kind of blanket are the characters wrapped in? Explore and show pictures of patchwork quilts and build understanding around this. Have your students ever seen one? Where/with whom?
    - Explain the importance/cultural significance of patchwork across the world – made often out of necessity and inventiveness, using scraps of fabric that would otherwise go to waste or may be all someone could afford.
- Read the dedication on the inside cover of the book. Notice that the authors thank their grandmothers and their families. The illustrator thanks her mother. Does this suggest that the character on the cover is a grandmother or mother? Or could she be any family member?

### WHILE READING

- After one uninterrupted, fluent read together, re-read and pause on interesting words. Discuss the interesting words that students might not have heard before: porch, hawk, mimicking, waterhole, horizon, etc.
- Discuss and identify the rhyming words in the text.
- Notice the words that describe how the child speaks. Go back over the pages and discuss and notice the following features:
  - rhyming words
  - words that indicate time passing
  - words that show us a picture:
  - words that show us the child is joking/playing
  - words that show us the child is falling asleep
  - notice the writer only writes 'the child says' once. 'Say' and 'said' are not always needed.
- Discuss with students why they think the characters do not have names.
- Discuss some of the key repeated words: 'I love you' and 'Is that all?'. Notice how the two family members are playing a game by repeating these words. What games do you play with your families? Do you have a silly word or song you repeat to entertain or tease each other?

**AFTER READING**

- View pp 14–15, where we see the dog and goanna. Ask students if what they see here is the same as their home? What is different?
  - Invite students to draw a home and family scene like this one. Include their family, their pets, the garden and outside surroundings. If they can remember, draw the kinds of plants they have at their home.
- Enlarge the pp 14–15, pp 16-17 with the tall trees, pp 20-21 with the red hills, and pp 24-25 with the cliffs and sea, as well as the end papers of the book where the patchwork quilt is displayed. Show some images of Hall's Creek and Gomeroi Country. Are there any similarities to the artwork in the book? Any differences?
  - If you were to make a quilt that showed you, your family, and your world, what would you put in the squares?
  - Select one square of you quilt that you think best shows you and your family or home. Mark your name on the back of this square. The teacher will photocopy and enlarge each student's chosen square, then arrange them on a wall as a 'class quilt',
- Discuss why Aboriginal people follow seasonal cycles, don't hunt all-year round but only at certain times, and move around the landscape.
  - Discuss how useful it is to have signals such as the emu in the sky to guide people through the seasons.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

**CARA SHIPP**