

Caring for Country: First Knowledges for Younger Readers

AUTHORS

BRUCE PASCOE AND BILL GAMMAGE

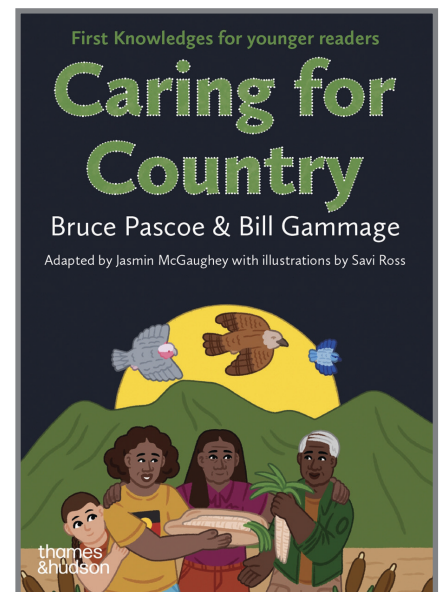
ILLUSTRATOR

SAVI ROSS

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



SYNOPSIS

This Younger Readers adaptation of *Caring for Country* comes from the critically acclaimed, best-selling First Knowledges series, with vibrant illustrations by Savi Ross.

What do you love about Australia? What do you want to protect and care for in Australia? What is your family history and identity? Before the white people came to the continent in 1788, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had special ways of caring for the land, waterways and animals, set out by law and lore through the Dreaming and songlines.

Bruce Pascoe and Bill Gammage invite you to learn about how our continent has changed since 1788 with the introduction of European farming practices and the interruption of traditional First Nations ways of caring.

Learn about traditional fire management, important native plants, and ways of working with Country to create a more sustainable future for us all.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Bruce Pascoe is a Bunurong, Yuin and Tasmanian Aboriginal writer of literary fiction, non-fiction, poetry, essays and children's literature. He is the enterprise professor in Indigenous Agriculture at the University of Melbourne. He is best known for his work *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the Birth of Agriculture* (Magabala Books, 2014).

Bill Gammage is an historian at the Humanities Research Centre, Australian National University. His books include *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* and three prize-winning titles—*Narrandera Shire*, *The Sky Travellers: Journeys in New Guinea 1938-1939* and *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Savi Ross is an African American, Torres Strait Islander illustrator based in Naarm Melbourne. Savi's illustrations often feature playful colour, friendship, and, most importantly, people of colour loving themselves and each other. Savi's illustrations are expressed through prints, zines and more, where they think about community and the joys of place and family. None of their work would be possible without real mountains, real love, and the many Black creatives who occupy space and beyond digital art.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE TEACHERS NOTES

Cara Shipp is a Wiradjuri/Welsh woman (descending from the Lamb and Shipp families in Central Western NSW, around Dubbo, Parkes and Trangie) and currently QLD Coordinator and National School Coach for Big Picture Learning Australia.

From 2018–2024, Cara was Head of Senior School at Silkwood School, Gold Coast, QLD. She 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). Cara has 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 Indigenous perspectives into the English curriculum. She has a blog on the topic, <https://missshipp.wordpress.com/>.

THEMES

- Identity, language, culture and belonging are interrelated and connected to place (for all people) and Country (for First Nations people)
- Impact of colonisation on Australian land, plants and animals
- First Nations knowledges in land management
- Recognition of First Nations custodianship of the land and rights as Traditional Owners
- Addressing environmental damage and climate change
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous people working together for a more sustainable future

STUDY NOTES

CHAPTER 2: BEFORE AND AFTER 1788

- Select a 'natural thing with the shape' talked about in this chapter.
 - Research your chosen natural thing:
 - Where is it found?
 - How does it survive?
 - What is needed to care for it?
 - What food or conditions does it need?
 - Is it endangered (and how)?
 - What changes made to the land after 1788 have impacted this natural thing?
 - What can be done to regenerate it?
 - How do First Nations people care for it?

Present a summary of your research on a poster.
- Contact your local First Nations rangers or Natural Resource Management (NRM) Department and ask them to speak to your class about local plants, animals and waterways (preferably on an excursion outdoors in the local landscape). Think of some questions to ask about your chosen natural thing during the excursion/incursion.
- Conduct a series of yarning circles to share your posters about the different natural things researched. Find out more about yarning circles at QCAA QLD Education: <<https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-perspectives/resources/yarning-circles>> During each yarning circle, create a physical tie between each student or group whose natural thing is connected. Photograph/record the connections so that you can set them up again each time you have a yarning circle, and keep adding the ties to the circle. It may take a few yarning circles to get through everyone's poster. After all posters have been shared, reflect on the following: What do you notice about the string/wool/streamer connections? What does this visual do to help you understand more about Australia's natural species and ecosystem?
- Imagine that the thing you chose to research is your totem. It is your responsibility to care for it. Who would you need to speak to and negotiate with?
 - Think about what your chosen natural thing needs. Who are you connected to? How would you need to work

with them?

- Consider the time and energy it would take if everyone had a totem they cared for. Would this be a good way to improve the future of our environment? Can you see how this system has worked for First Nations people for many thousands of years? Can you see why this was the main 'job' and 'work' that First Nations people had before 1788? Do you think we could create more 'jobs' like this in our future?
- What is your understanding now of what 'Country' means to First Nations people? (you may wish to revisit the explanation on p 18).
- Learn more about fire practices: Visit Firesticks Alliance for a number of education resources about cultural burning:
 - <https://firesticks.org.au/resources/>
 - <https://firesticks.org.au/videos/>

CHAPTER 3: LAND CARE

- Uncle Bruce talks about the new arrivals to Australia in 1788 fearing the land and feeling that they had to fight it and conquer it. Discuss what Uncle Bruce says about the snakes at King Island. What did his father teach him about snakes?
 - Discuss this video by Wiradjuri man Mark Saddler, 'Aboriginal Wiradjuri Cultural Land Management' <[youtube.com/watch?v=pFZ-vtRGSaW](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFZ-vtRGSaW)>. In what ways do we see that Aboriginal people do the opposite of fearing and fighting the land? Consider all the ways they use the land carefully and make good use out of a tree that they cut down.
- Uncle Bruce remembers being near devastating bushfires in 2019–20. Do you have any memories about bushfires? Have you been near one yourself? Do you remember seeing one on the news? Share with the class.
- Uncle Bruce asks, who will save the trees? What ideas do you have for saving trees in our environment? Have you ever volunteered to help this cause?
- Re-read and discuss the story about how Uncle Bruce's farm regenerated after the fire, and the two new grasses they were able to harvest (p 42), along with the farming solutions on pp 46–7. Discuss how the work on Uncle Bruce's farm led to a better recovery of the area after the fires. Discuss the other solutions put forward for improving farming. Are these solutions practical? What other ideas do the students have?
- Uncle Bruce tells us about an important tree that was part of the lore of his people. It was a 'scar tree' where you would see a scar in it showing where the bark had been removed to make a coolamon or a canoe. It was a special tree where his people would go to learn the lore from one of their creator spirits, Dooligah. His community had asked the government to protect it before the fires but they didn't, and after the fires it was chopped down because it was named a 'killer tree' and believed to have fuelled the fires. Discuss and explore the following questions:
 - Are there any scar trees or significant sites in your local area? Research this and/or ask your local First Nations rangers/NRM. If you find a special site, is it protected by the government? Do you think it should be?
- Uncle Bruce suggests that because Aboriginal farming practices looked different to European ways, the colonisers assumed that Aboriginal people didn't do any farming or caring for the land, and so they said that no-one owned the land. Assumptions like this is what the colonisation of this country was based on. It is how the country was taken in 1788, by the use of the law 'Terra Nullius'. Explore this idea through the National Museum of Australia's Defining Moments digital classroom on the 'Mabo Decision': <<https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/mabo-decision>>
 - Was the Terra Nullius law fair?
 - Do you think Terra Nullius was a mistake, a misunderstanding, or a deliberate lie? Or something else?

CHAPTER 5: A FIRE-FRIENDLY COUNTRY

- Do you understand the following key points? Choose a topic and explain it to another student.
 - Types of fire plants pp 75–76
 - Times and seasons to use fire, pp 78–80.
- What are some of the most interesting facts you have learned from this chapter? Share in a class discussion or

yarning circle.

- Bill Gammage tells us that over 70 per cent of Australian native plants use fire to re-seed or regenerate. Consider how much damage must have been caused to the land when the first settlers in 1788 stopped First Nations people from burning, out of a fear of fire.

CHAPTER 6: WORKING WITH COUNTRY

- Work in groups of four to learn and research a topic from this chapter. In your groups, re-read the relevant section of the chapter, discuss and summarise it, and then research the topic further using the key words from the chapter. Then, bring your work back to teach the whole class. The topics and prompts are:
 - Plants: Australian plants have adapted to our soil and don't need as much phosphorus, removing the need for fertilisers and chemical additives. Learn some key Australian native plants and their uses, pp 89–96.
 - Bread and grains: Learn about the evidence that Aboriginal people were the world's first bakers, and the tricks passed down through generations to make bread rise, pp 97–9.
 - First Nations businesses selling Indigenous foods and bushtucker: learn about Black Duck Foods, p 88. Find out what other similar businesses exist around Australia.
 - Aboriginal bee farming: learn about traditional farming methods for native bees and research the benefits of native bees and honey to the local environment and to humans, p 99.
- Discuss why Uncle Bruce says he is nervous about sharing his people's knowledge of Country, in case the knowledge is taken without permission and used for commercial gain without acknowledging or compensating First Nations knowledge holders. Discuss ideas for how First Nations people can be included in business activity and profits made with their knowledge and resources.

CHAPTERS 7–9: FUTURE FARMING; OUR COUNTRY NEEDS HELP; HOW WE MIGHT LOVE MOTHER EARTH MORE

- Write about an issue from these chapters. You may also wish to write letters seeking action on these issues from local government. Issues and topics may include:
 - The protein challenge
 - Sustainable fishing
 - The traditional use of fire and examples of how past governments banned these Aboriginal practices, despite the clear benefits of these approaches.
 - Regenerative farming practices and ways for First Nations and non-Indigenous farmers to form partnerships
 - Deforestation and degradation of forests
 - The impact of introduced species such as cats and foxes.
- Discuss the concept of a 'treaty'. A treaty is an agreement made between government and First Nations people which can formally recognise their custodianship of the land and, for example, agree on how they can access their land, cultural sites, and practise their traditional lore and law within contemporary Australia.
 - Read about the New Zealand/Aotearoa treaty and discuss whether you think this could help us in Australia. What could a treaty do for First Nations people? How can this in turn benefit all of the community?

AUTHOR OF NOTES

CARA SHIPP