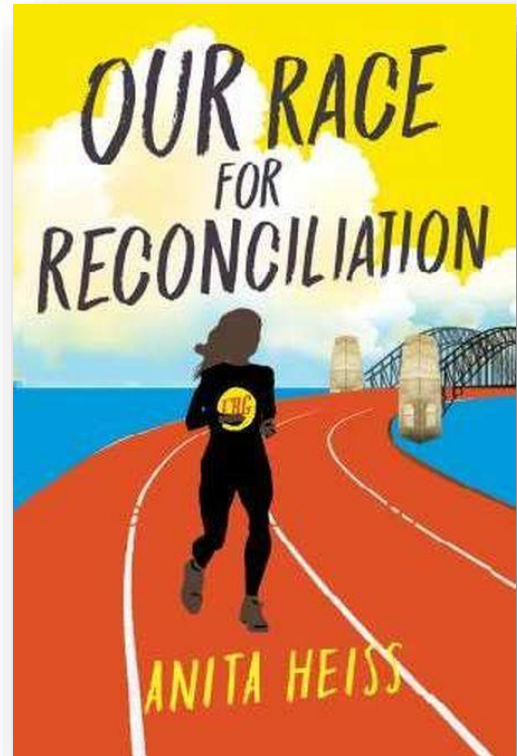


# Our Race for Reconciliation

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2000 was an important year in Australian history, and for Mel, a ten year old Murri girl growing up in Ipswich, Queensland, it is a year that she will never forget. Mel has always loved running, and yearns to be a famous Indigenous athlete like Cathy Freeman. To her, it seems that 2000 will be the most amazing year ever, for not only will the Olympics be in Sydney, but Cathy is a favourite to win gold. Cathy's successes inspire Mel to try even harder herself, and Mel dreams of visiting Sydney, of meeting Cathy, and of one day being an Olympic athlete. Reality, however, doesn't always match daydreams, and for Mel the year turns out to hold challenges, opportunities, and surprises that she never expected.

Themes: Indigenous Australia; Reconciliation; Prejudice and Bigotry; Respect; Pride; Responsibility; Family and Friendship.

## TEACHER NOTES

Sydney in 2000 was home to more than just the Olympics. It was also the site of Corroboree 2000, and the inaugural National Walk for Reconciliation across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Both of these events were part of the fifth National Reconciliation Week, and for all that she had been dreaming of visiting Sydney, when Mel found out that she and her family would be travelling down to take part, she could barely believe it. Surrounded by her large and loving family, Mel has always been proud of being Murri, an Indigenous Australian, but she has also grown up seeing sadness at loss of family cloud her beloved Grandmother's eyes.

The history of Australia's Indigenous people since settlement, the stolen generations, and the impact these events still have on people today is a difficult concept for some to grasp. For Mel however, this history is immediate and personal, and its impact on her family, and on her, is still felt. Having the chance to be part of something that acknowledges the wrongs that have been done to her people, celebrates who they are and were, and looks towards ways for building a better future for all Australians — is an experience that Mel finds humbling, empowering, and utterly exhilarating.

For Mel, 2000 really is a year of wonders. She learns more about her personal heritage and history, and about Australia as a whole. She encounters prejudice and bigotry on a personal level, and sees her brother handle racist remarks with dignity and respectful pride. Her respect for her father's knowledge and understanding of history, politics, current events and Indigenous Australia increases every time he voices an opinion, and she begins to realise just how much she has to be proud of. And at the end of the day, 2000 is a year when Mel grows, learns, and above all takes pride in who she is and the things she is a part of. She has pride in her running, pride in her family, pride in being Murri, and pride in her growing ability to understand more about the world she lives in and the people around her. For Mel, she now knows, will be spending her life racing not just to a finish line and a medal, but as part of something larger: she will be racing to reconciliation for her people and for all Australians

## Writing Style

*Race to Reconciliation* is written in the first person from the point of view of the 10-year-old protagonist. The first person voice is true to the age of the main character, and the author's style reflects the speech patterns and interests of a child of that age, and of the era. The protagonist is a thoughtful and insightful child, and while the events that surround her are at times confusing, the adults in her life take the time to explain and clarify matters in an age-appropriate manner.

The story deals with several issues and topics that are potentially confrontational to some readers, and that many adults struggle to understand (such as the necessity for an official apology to the stolen generation). The author's chosen format and voice makes challenging concepts accessible to a young readership, while the explanations given to the protagonist – and her internal reactions to them – allow the author to clarify and expand on ideas and events whilst staying faithful to the characters and plotline. Mel is an engaging and enthusiastic main character, and her interactions with adults, family, friends and classmates all ring true, and help bring her story, and the story of how Australia is slowly moving towards reconciliation and respect, to life.

## Study Notes and Activities

NOTE: Please be aware that the linked video footage in some of the below activities may contain images and voices of people who are no longer living. It is recommended that teachers view all footage before showing it to students, and use their discretion when choosing activities in order to ensure that all students feel that they and their families are respected.

- The concept of reconciliation is an important one in both the novel, and to Australia. As a class discuss the meaning of reconciliation. You will want to include in your discussion:
  - The dictionary definition of the word
  - What reconciliation means to Australia
  - What reconciliation means to the different characters in the book
  - What reconciliation means to you.

- What is National Reconciliation Week, and why is it important to all Australians?  
Individually or in small groups research National Reconciliation Week, and prepare a PowerPoint presentation or a poster to share with the class. Some questions you might want to answer include:
  - When was National Reconciliation Week first celebrated?
  - Why is National Reconciliation Week important to Australia and to all Australians?
  - What is the significance of the dates that fall during National Reconciliation Week (May 26 and June 3)?
  - How is National Reconciliation Week being commemorated in your local community?
  
- In the novel, Mel and Sam are both intrigued by the way that the Sydney Harbour Bridge was built from both ends at once and came together in the middle. Mel likes the symbolism of the way the bridge was built, and likens it to how she sees the Australian people coming together. As a class, discuss the symbolism of the bridge. What other ways does the Harbour Bridge symbolise the process of reconciliation in Australia?
  
- When telling Mel and Sam about National Sorry Day, and why they will be travelling to Sydney, Mel's mother talks about the 1997 report *Bringing them Home*. As a class, investigate and discuss this report
  - Teacher resources can be found at the Australian Human Rights website <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/publications/rightsed-bringing-them-home>
  - A pdf of the report can be downloaded from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/bringing-them-home-stolen>
  
- Mel, Sam, Trish and their class at school celebrate NAIDOC week. As a class, discuss NAIDOC week, how and why it started, and why it is relevant to us all. Information about NAIDOC week can be found at the NAIDOC website <http://www.naidoc.org.au>

- Plan some activities for NAIDOC week. They can be for your class, or for your whole school. Try to involve your local community in your activities.
- Participate in a Bridge Walk in your local area. If your community does not have one planned, then either as a class or as a whole school, plan, organise, and participate in one.
- Mel's class is asked to write a letter to someone who has inspired them. Write a letter to someone who has inspired you. It might be a famous person, or it could be a friend, a family member, or another person in your daily life.
- As a class, discuss Cathy Freeman. Why do you think she is Mel's all-time favourite athlete? What has her impact been on Australia, and on young Indigenous people like Mel? You can watch a video of her running in the 400m final at the Sydney Olympics at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTCnO5MXvol> and a video of people's reactions to her race at <http://www.abc.net.au/archives/80days/stories/2012/01/19/3412111.htm>
- Ask the adults in your life to talk to you about their memories of the Sydney Olympics and Cathy Freeman. What do they remember of the race, did they watch it, and how did they feel at the time? What was the best moment of the Olympics for them? As a class, share the responses you received and discuss what you think it was like for people at the time.
- There are several famous Indigenous Australian singers, writers, poets and sportspeople mentioned in the book — but there are many more incredibly talented people who weren't mentioned. Choose an area that you are interested in such as music, art, or a sport, and research an Indigenous Australian who has excelled in that area. Write a speech to share your research findings, and present it to the class.
- What events are there at the Olympic Games? Write a short piece sharing which event is your favourite one, and why.

- Miss C asks Sam and Mel's class to write about themselves, who they are, where they belong, and what they want to be when they grow up. Do this exercise yourself, and share your work with the class. As a class, discuss what this exercise tells us about ourselves and about each other, and why Miss C asked her class to do it.
- Individually, or in pairs, make a model of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Think carefully about what construction material you should use, you may want to use cardboard, straws, or wire for the arch, or something else entirely.
- Mel's mum has told her that Toowoomba is the home of the lamington, and Mel wonders if this is true. Investigate the history of lamingtons, and then make some!
- Trish didn't want to show the letter she had written to Mel. In small groups, discuss her letter. Why do you think she didn't want to share it? Why might Mel's eyes have started to water when she read it? What do you think makes a good friend? Make sure to think about the difference between being proud of someone else and being jealous.
- Mel's brother Tony is learning to play the didgeridoo. Go online and search for didgeridoo music, and listen to it. The didgeridoo is not only a traditional instrument but is also used in some modern popular Australian music — research and identify at least one mainstream song that includes the didgeridoo in its instrumentation.
- When Nanna Flora was a child, she was taken away from her home, her family, and everything she knew, and had to work as a servant. Based on the information in the book, write a short story from the point of view of Nanna Flora when she was a child, describing how she felt and what it was like for her.
- As a class, discuss what an apology is, and when and why it is appropriate to apologise to someone else. Think about the difference between apologising for, and apologising that. To whom does an apology make the biggest difference? Why do you think this is so? Think about the word sorry, what it means, and how it is related to the word sorrow.

- John Howard was the Prime Minister of Australia at the time when the book is set, and repeatedly refused to apologise for the past acts of the Australian Government. In 2007 Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister of Australia, and apologised to Australia's Indigenous peoples. Watch a video of Mr Rudd's apology, and as a class discuss what you saw, and what he said. You can find a copy of the apology as well as other resources at <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>
- Mel sees a sign at the Bridge Walk that says 'Responsibility not Guilt'. What do you think this means? As a class, discuss your thoughts about this sign, and what it represents. Consider the difference between John Howard's and Kevin Rudd's attitudes to apologising in relation to the concept related by this sign.
- As a class, discuss the Australian Aboriginal flag. Who designed it and when? What is the meaning and symbology of the colours and shapes?
- Mel saw an Australian flag where the Union Jack had been replaced with the Aboriginal flag, and thought that it was a good idea because it represented all Australians and not just one group. Individually, or in pairs or small groups, design a flag that you think represents, and is relevant to, all Australians. Share your design with the class, and explain your chosen symbology and colours.
- Mel's father was upset when he saw that the information plaque at Port Macquarie only mentioned the European settlers and their history in the area and said nothing about the Indigenous people and their history there. He said that not telling the whole story was like telling lies. As a class, research the history of your local area, and write an informative booklet. Be sure to include information about all the people who have lived in your area over time, from the original Indigenous inhabitants, to the settlers in the colonial era, and to recent immigrants. For all groups mentioned, talk about their languages, some important cultural practices and celebrations, their name for your local area, and their interactions with the natural environment.

- There are several Indigenous musicians mentioned in the book. Choose one of these musicians or groups, and listen to some of their music. Choose one track to share with the class. Talk about what you like in the music and the lyrics, and why you chose this particular piece to share.
- Mel and her family are Murri, while the Aboriginal people in Sydney name themselves as Koori. Why is it important to respect how people name themselves, and the cultural and ethnic groups they belong to? What are the Indigenous names for the Country and People that are local to your area? As a class, discuss how it feels to be given a name or label by others, as opposed to being allowed to identify yourself.