



## Teacher Notes

### *The Mark of the Wagarl*

written by Lorna Little and illustrated by Janice Lyndon

#### Magabala Books

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler (Teacher Librarian)

## SYNOPSIS

*The Mark of the Wagarl* tells the story of Maadjit Walken, the Sacred Rainbow Serpent. She is the mother spirit and creator of the Nyoongar Country of south west Western Australia. She made her first child, Maadjit Wagarl, the guardian spirit of all the rivers and fresh waters. This story shares how a young boy receives the Maadjit Wagarl for his totem.

## THEMES

### Aboriginal culture and customs

Nyoongar language words are incorporated into the text

The Maadjit Wagarl is given as a totem to Baardi

The spiritual beliefs of the Nyoongar people are integral to this story. Maadjit Walken, the Sacred Rainbow Serpent, and her first born, Maadjit Wagarl, the Sacred Water Snake, form the basis for the text.

Stories of the Wagarl are shared with the children

## WRITING STYLE

Written in third person, past tense, *The Mark of the Wagarl* tells the story of the Wagarl, the sacred water snake. The narrative is told simply and effectively and contains a strong moral.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

Before reading the story, read and discuss the introductory explanation about Maadjit Walken, the Sacred Rainbow Serpent and her first child, Maadjit Wagarl, the Sacred Water Snake.

Using a map of Australia, show where the Nyoongar Country is to gain an understanding of where this story takes place.

On the first page opening, we are told that 'the old people would tell the children many stories about the Wagarl'. Read other stories about the Wagarl. Compare these stories with *The Mark of the Wagarl*.

Why did the people make sure that they always knew where the Wagarl was?

Why did Baardi disobey his elders and decide to swim in the river?

Write a reflection of a time when you disobeyed your parents' instructions. What were the consequences? Discuss the concept that there are consequences for your actions. How is this shown in the text?

With older students, discuss the concept of spiritual things that are not visible. Why does Baardi think that the Wagarl is not down in the cave?

Using images from the internet to reflect this story, create a Digital Story of *The Mark of the Wagarl* using PhotoStory 3. This can be downloaded for free <http://www.microsoft.com/en-us/download/details.aspx?id=11132>.

Research the role that totems play in Aboriginal culture.

Why did Baardi receive the Wagarl as his totem?

Read other stories that share the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people. You may wish to search for such a story from your own local area.

Invite a guest speaker to share local stories and beliefs with your class. Choose one of these stories to recreate as a picture book of your own.

What are the main themes and morals of *The Mark of the Wagarl*?

The artwork in *The Mark of the Wagarl* uses beautiful, strong colours and is different from other types of indigenous artwork. It evokes the art style of the Nyoongar artists of the 1950s. Use Google Images to find examples of the art from this region and era. Compare the illustrations in *The Mark of the Wagarl* with those found online.

Using watercolours, choose a scene from *The Mark of the Wagarl* to illustrate in a style comparable to Janice Lyndon's.

Search for Aboriginal artwork of the Wagarl on the internet. Compare these paintings with the story of *The Mark of the Wagarl*. Here is one example <http://www.byport.com.au/wagarl.html>