

Teacher Notes

The Sugarbag

written by Nola Turner-Jensen and illustrated by Dub Leffler

Magabala Books

Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler (Teacher Librarian)

SYNOPSIS

The Sugarbag shares the story of Jimmy and Max, who on their way to visit their grandfather encounter a stingless native bee. Jimmy has learnt about this type of bee and how to hunt for its 'sugarbag' — honey! He takes this opportunity to teach his younger brother how to find this hidden treasure.

THEMES

Aboriginal culture and customs

- Rites of passage — learning how to hunt and gather in traditional Aboriginal ways.
- The Wiradjuri word for honey 'ngarruu' is used in the text, as is 'dhalay', which is an expression of frustration.

Adventure

- Jimmy and Max embark on an adventure to follow the bee and find its treasure.
- Max imagines the treasure as something far different from what he eventually finds.

Native Bees and their 'sugarbag' honey

- The habitat and behaviour of the native stingless bee and the production of honey is included.

WRITING STYLE

Written in third person, past tense, *The Sugarbag* is a narrative told simply and effectively. The words are at times written in shapes to depict the movement of the bee and the boys.

Some Wiradjuri language words are included.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Before reading the story, discuss what a 'sugarbag' might be. What clues are there on the front cover?
- Compare the taste of 'sugarbag' made by native stingless bees and honey made by non-native bees.
- Research and create a poster to explain the process that bees use to make honey. See the Qld Museum's site.
<http://www.qm.qld.gov.au/Find+out+about/Animals+of+Queensland/Insects/Wasps+and+bees/Common+species/Native+Stingless+Bees+or+Sugar+Bag+Bees>
- Invite a beekeeper to speak with students about the keeping of bees and the making of honey.
- Do some cooking using honey as a key ingredient, for example, honey biscuits.
- Watch Youtube clips that show how honey is harvested from native bees. There are many available.
- Visit websites such as <http://www.sugarbag.net/bees/> that explain how native bees create their honey. Use small sections of the PDFs on this website to complete reading comprehension activities or to teach note-taking skills when researching.
- With a partner, recreate *The Sugarbag* in a dramatic performance.
- Write a poem about native stingless bees. Use similes and onomatopoeia to help bring the poem to life. Share these poems with your class.
- Create bees and a sugarbag to display in the classroom.
- Discuss the importance of the passing down of skills from one generation to the next? What skills have you learnt from your parents or grandparents?
- Using the dialogue in the text, teach students the correct punctuation conventions and language features when using dialogue.
- There are puns in the text. Find these and discuss what effect these puns have to the story.
- Create a comic strip version of *The Sugarbag*.
- Research other 'treasures' Aboriginal people find for food in the bush. Create an information report or brochure about 'bush tucker'.
- Use pastels to create your own illustrations to complement *The Sugarbag*.