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KEY LEARNING OUTCOMES

Australian Curriculum: (ACELT1613), (ACELA1490), (ACELA1492) (ACELA1498) , (ACELT1603), (ACELY1602), (ACELY1697), (ACELY1687), ACHASS1081, ACSSU073, ACHSE062,

NSW Syllabus: EN2-1A, EN2-2A, EN2-4A, EN2-8B, EN2-10C, EN2-11D, HT2-2, GE2-1, GE2-2, GE2-3, ST2-2VA

Rain Stones

By Jackie French

'Rain Stones' and the other stories in this collection reveal that the country is a magical place, that there is an extra dimension to be found by those whose minds and hearts are open to the possibility. Michael knows that the hills around Canberra are sleeping dinosaurs waiting for darkness to fall to begin their nightly dance. Jacob is blind, but he can show his friends things they never dreamt existed. And Helen is hoping that the rain stones will bring rain to the parched land where everything is dying.

Powerful, imaginative and moving, this collection of short stories reveal the extraordinary early talent of this remarkable writer.

APPROPRIATE AGES: 10+

CURRICULUM AREAS:

This book works well with the Year 3-4, Stage 2 outcomes. Depending on the age of the students and their proficiency the book could be read aloud with the teacher and/or broken into shorter stories for reading in groups.

Learning areas: English, Science, HASS

Cross Curriculum Priorities: Sustainability (OI 1-9), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures (OI 2, 3, 5, 6)

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BOOK SUMMARY:

Anniversary edition of the first book Jackie French published with A & R. This is where a truly remarkable career began. 'Rain Stones' and the other stories in this collection reveal that the country is a magical place, that there is an extra dimension to be found by those whose minds and hearts are open to the possibility. Michael knows that the hills around Canberra are sleeping dinosaurs waiting for darkness to fall to begin their nightly dance. Jacob is blind, but he can show his friends things they never dreamt existed. And Helen is hoping that the rain stones will bring rain to the parched land where everything is dying. Powerful, imaginative and moving, this collection of short stories reveal the extraordinary early talent of this remarkable writer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie was the Australian Children's Laureate for 2014/15 and the 2015 Senior Australian of the Year. She is also an historian, ecologist, dyslexic, and a passionate worker for literacy, the right of all children to be able to read, and the power of books.

Jackie's writing career spans 25 years, 148 wombats, over 140 books, 36 languages, 3,721 bush rats, and over 60 awards in Australia and overseas.

Jackie is also the ACT Children's Week Ambassador, 2011 Federal Literacy Ambassador, patron of Books for Kids, YESS, and joint patron of Monkey Baa Theatre for Young People with Susanne Gervais and Morris Gleitzman. She is also a director of The Wombat Foundation that raises funds for research into the preservation of the endangered northern hairy nosed wombat.

<http://www.jackiefrench.com/>

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

Rain Stones is a timeless book that will inspire young readers to take a book outside and journey into nature. It is also a book that enables students to bring their own experiences in nature into the classroom and their own writing.

EXPLORING THE STORIES

Rain Stones

Lesson: 'We'll look for them together,' he said. (Pg24)

Jackie paints a vivid picture of the dryness of the land. *'The dead grass breathed heat'* Pg3. What are the consequences of the drought on the plants and animals in the area? Why does the wombat need to be euthanized? Create a map of the land before the rains.

Helen pleads with Mr Sarancen *'It's your country. Even if you're from Sydney. You have to help it.'* (Pg23) What is the Aboriginal concept of caring for country? Learn more about caring for country by going to the NSW Curriculum Support unit.

<http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/assets/pdf/caring/caringpl ace.pdf>

Helen think the rain stones would be a *'rock with a special feel, a cold rock that made you think of rain'*. (Pg23) Using papier mache create your own Rain Stones. Write a poem to the environment in tiny letters on your stone. (Activity reference)

Afternoon with Grandma

Lesson: 'Her ATA wings!' (Pg 48)

'The girl's clothes were weird, like she'd just fallen out of a movie or something.' (Pg34) In what other ways is life different for Dorothy Penelope?

'An eagle,' said Dorothy Penelope dreamily. 'I'd be an eagle. I'd watch the ground, like a coloured map below me, then I'd turn and drift into the horizon. I'd float on the air and let it carry me away and when I wanted to I'd soar.' (Pg44) What words would you use to describe what the eagle symbolizes for Dorothy? What kind of bird would you be?

'But there weren't any jobs for women pilots then, there were too many men looking for the same jobs.' (Pg51) Are women more likely to become pilots today than in Dorothy's time?

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Jacob Saw

Lesson: *Maybe I could show you things you wouldn't see, not just by using your eyes.* Pg72

'I told Mum about him being here. She said he shouldn't be allowed. They've got special schools for people like him.' (Pg67) Simon tries to help Amy understand that having one physical disability doesn't necessarily limit a person's ability to achieve. Watch the current Paralympic promotional video, how have attitudes towards differently abled people changed over time. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=locLkk3aYlk>

'It smells different,' said Jacob. 'I can't tell all the trees. But this one smells like honey. And you can hear the bees. Listen ... See?' (Pg77) Walk through the local bush, close your eyes or use a blindfold to experience the environment. Are your other senses sharper? Can you smell, feel and hear things you wouldn't normally. Create a blindfolded bush experience for the other students at your school to experience.

'Ben came to a decision. He touched Jacob on the arm. 'Say, do you want to put your hand on my arm? Like you did with Billo?'' (Pg82) What is the best way to be a good friend to a person with a disability?

Dancing Dinosaurs

Lesson: *'The past is part of our present.'* (Pg110)

'Who'd have thought of giving the thickset, tank-like minmi a bright red comb like a chook, or drawing a giant iguanodon with a trailing goat-like beard?' (Pg99) The story helps us to question history. Find other Australian dinosaurs and create your own paintings of them, keep the main features the same but imagine little details or colours that might have been missed.

'Then the boulders on the hills began to move. They rose and uncurled arms and legs. They stretched their backs and yawned. Their yellow beaks glinted. They lifted one long leg and then another, standing upright like delicate kangaroos. Their eyes shone like the stars. Suddenly the hill was moving, covered with delicate dancing rocks. They pranced and skipped and lifted their faces to the sky.' Pg108 Jackie uses words to bring the hills of Canberra to life. Do you believe the dinosaurs are really alive and hiding from us?

'Sometimes when you walk across the feathery grass you'd swear they breathed, or moved in the shimmering summer light, the golden haired hills of Canberra, the ancient hills with furry feet.' (Pg114) Do you think that the hills of Canberra inspired Jackie to write about dinosaurs or did she have an interest in dinosaurs and then think to place them in the hills of Canberra?

Dusty and the Dragon

Lesson: 'You are what you love.' (Pg161)

'Have you seen what happens when they chip a forest? The soil washes in the rain and wind. You think what the creek'll be like after woodchipping — silted all along it so it floods in the wet and goes dry in the drought. Think of the animals that'll die without the creek. Think of the fires after all that mess. You get fires where you get woodchipping and they spread. Too right they spread.' (Pg 140) The first edition of this story was published in 1991. Why does land clearing happen? Is it still a threat to the bush? Would you fight to protect your favourite bit of bush?

'It's a magic dragon,' said Gwyn. 'I've thought for days the valley must be magic. It has to be magic to be as beautiful as this. You can't hurt magic places.' (Pg 166) Do you think there is magic in natural places? Can you think of something magical you have seen in nature?

Dusty sat down at the table and looked at them. 'You realise what this means?' he asked. 'It takes a lot out of you when you begin to love the land. It's not just one battle. Once you commit yourself there's a million ways you have to fight. It's a big decision.' (Pg168) What does Dusty mean by this?

THEMES

Jackie French's collection of short stories opens a window to see the natural world, differently. Each story is layered with scientific and ecological references, human relationships with nature and the unseen world of the imagination that the bush inspires.

Place

Jackie takes care to provide us with the specific names of plants, animals and places encountered by the children on their adventures. With each story you feel as though you could be walking through the landscape seeing every tree and lizard just as she does.

Why is specific information about the place important to the stories? Which descriptions of place bring the story to life for you?

Magic

'Magical realism, magic realism, or marvelous realism is literature, painting, film, and theatre that, while encompassing a range of subtly different concepts, share in common an acceptance of magic in the rational world.' ([Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magical_realism))

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Each story in the collection provides a magical or fantasy element. This adds interest and helps us understand how the characters in the story think.

What elements of the story are magical realism? As seen through the main character's eyes are the magical elements real or fantasy?

Lesson

This book was first published in 1991, twenty-five years ago. The author has always had a special relationship with nature and the bush. These stories were ahead of their time in that they provided important lessons on appreciating and protecting the environment.

What lesson is in the story? Do you think the lessons are still important twenty-five years later?

Activity

Break the students into 5 groups and have them create an informal presentation of the story they read. Include the following elements:

- Summary of the story
- Draw a picture of the land include scientific drawings of the plants and animals
- Describe the magical realism element embedded within the story
- Write a question or statement to start a discussion on the lesson in the story.

CREATING YOUR STORY

Using Jackie's stories as inspiration create a digital story of your own. You could choose to create your story for younger children to learn about the magic of the land in your area. Your story should cover the three main themes in a similar way to Jackie's short stories. It should include images of nature as well as digital representations of the magic you imagine to be just below the surface.

Find an area around your school or local area. Complete this quiet meditation in the bush and then work in groups to create a story about the land.

Meditation & Exploration

Lie or sit in a comfortable position. Take three deep breaths in through the nose, right into your tummy and out through the mouth. Relax your whole body.

Now bring your attention to everything you can feel, hear and smell around you. Take another deep breath and smell the scent of the bush. Can you smell natural things like honey, water, dirt, eucalyptus? What about anything unnatural? Car fumes, food cooking? Now let your imagination create a magical smell, such as fairyfloss or gingerbread.

Now bring your attention to the sounds around you. What natural sounds can you hear? Birds, insects, mosquitos, water, children laughing. What unnatural things can you hear? Trucks, beeps, bells. Now let your imagination create a magical sound such as music.

Now what can you feel around you. What natural things can you feel? Wind, dirt, happiness etc. What unnatural things can you feel? Boardwalk, concrete. Now let your imagination create a magical feeling. What is the feeling? A ghost, a spirit, a buzz, a zap?

Finally, open your eyes and survey the environment with a scientific eye. How many of the plants and animals from the story can you identify in the area? Take pictures of the plants and/or animals that you have discovered. Later you could find the names of any plants and animals you discovered by using a reference such as *Atlas of Living Australia*.

Now let your imagination create a whole story in this area. What things have you uncovered that no-one else can see? Why are they there? To teach you something? To entertain you? To help you remember? Tell the story to the person next to you.

Create your story

Using the notes from your bush exploration create an imaginative story. Your story could be written as a traditional story or told in an innovative way. Eg:

- A photo story, video or other digital story
- Story walk through in the environment (performance/posters)
- Audio recording

Include the following elements:

- Summary of the story
- An interesting descriptions of the place
- An unexpected or magical surprise
- A lesson that the main character learns along the way

REFERENCES

- <http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/hsie/assets/pdf/caring/caringplace.pdf>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=locLkk3aYlk>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_realism
- <http://www.ala.org.au/>
- <http://redroomcompany.org/> (Stone poem activity)

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