



Synopsis

Taha and his mum, a new Australian citizen, are travelling around Australia. After their stay in Longreach, Taha and his mother turn their campervan, the Southern Cross, towards the red heart of Australia – Alice Springs. They stay the night in Boulia, which is the halfway point. When they reach their destination, they spend some time exploring the town, and then travel south to see Uluru, Kaja Tjuta and Kings Canyon. Taha records his travels with photographs and notes in the journal that he was given by his teacher, Mrs Zimmerman. He also writes letters to his neighbour back home, Mr Wilson and emails his best friend, Joel.

Before Reading

Discuss the following:

- The book format – Students can read the blurb, the table of contents and skim additional features such as the Aussie Jokes, Slang and Facts. Is this a fiction or non-fiction book? Does the photography have an impact on the reader? Why? (For example, turn to the photographs of Uluru, pp94-95.)
- Citizenship and immigration – Review the citizenship ceremony (pp6-9) and discuss the importance placed on this ceremonial event. Talk about why, and from where, people migrate to Australia and then become Australian citizens. Locate Ireland on a world map. What differences does Paul Dooley find in Australia? Discuss the concept of 'accents' and how English is spoken differently by people from different English-speaking countries.
- Campervans – Taha and Mum are heading into extremely isolated country on this trip. Discuss the importance of travelling in such conditions and the steps required to ensure safety and roadworthiness.
- Indigenous Australians – Do students know about the indigenous Australians or traditional owners of the land in their local area or Alice Springs? Do students know about some of the Aboriginal dreamtime stories and legends that explain the natural features of central Australia?

There are many references within the text, where European names have blended with or been changed back to original Aboriginal names (for example, 'Ayers Rock/Uluru' and 'Kata Tjuta/The Olgas'). Students can research other states to find features with similar naming histories. (It is important to acknowledge the role of indigenous Australians and explore Australia's indigenous history prior to European settlement.)

Build up a collection of resources such as books, travel magazines, maps, street directories and websites.

Language Features and Activities

First person narrative:

- The author engages the reader by using a character, Taha, to tell the story. This makes the narrative very personal. Taha's conversations with his mum and the people he meets give us an insight into their personalities and characters. (For example, in Taha's letter to Mr Wilson he confesses that '... just between you and me, I'd be totally surprised if a wicketty grub tasted anywhere near as good as Mum's baklava...' (p30). This demonstrates Taha's love for Mum, even if it is shown through food!

Journals:

- Taha uses his journal to keep photographs and record written information about his trip. Re-read Taha's journal entries (pp65-73). Re-write the information in list form. Why did Taha include the Alice Springs Overland Telegraph Station in his journal?

Emails and letters:

- Talk about both formats in terms of language, forms of address, use of images, intended reader and reading/writing equipment required. Explore similarities and differences between the forms. Re-read the letter Taha wrote to Mr Wilson (pp25-31). Model how to set out a letter with addresses and salutations. What was the focus of Taha's letter? Has Taha written an interesting and informative letter? Why? Re-read Taha's email to Joel (pp75-83). What would Joel think about the Todd River Regatta? Draft a response from Joel.

Postcards and pamphlets:

- Students can use Blackline Master 5 to create a postcard. They can imagine that they are Taha, writing to his class. Encourage them to use the correct format with an address and stamp. If necessary, students can use the back of the Blackline Master to draft their text first. Look at the list of places on page 63 and review the photos on the following pages. Ask students to design a tourism brochure, using the ideas on Blackline Master 4 as a starting point. They should include bold colour, an interesting but clear layout, and illustrations or photographs.

Factual writing:

- Most of the factual information in the text is presented using the device of the Oracle Pod. However, there are other occasions when Mum and Taha give information to the reader. Students can use Blackline Master 3 to investigate and research topics referred to in the text.

Vocabulary:

- The text offers many opportunities for working with words. Read the Banjo Patterson poem (pp41-42)

and discuss the simile 'With claws that are strong as steel'. Search the text to find more examples.

- Visit the school and local library for books based on Aboriginal legends. Explain 'legend' in this context and compare Aboriginal legends with the legends of other indigenous peoples such as Native Americans or the Inuit people of Alaska.
- Use a dictionary to find meanings for words such as 'rummaged', 'geographic', 'atmospheric', 'incorporated', 'delirious', 'summit', 'rim walk', 'navigator'.
- Ask students to make a list of bold or coloured words and explain why these are used in the text (for example, as sound effects or to describe and emphasise size or other physical features).
- Ask students to find descriptive phrases such as 'Gee Mr Wilson, that's got to be the greatest invention in the history of inventions.' Students can use Blackline Master 4 for additional work with adjectives.
- Explore the list of Australian slang (p122).
- Students can review the dangers of travelling in the outback (pp46-49), and Harold Lasseter's failed attempts to retrace his own steps (pp117-119). Form groups to discuss and choose items for an 'outback survival kit'. Each group can share their ideas to collate, create and display a final class list of about 15 items.
- Hold a class debate. Propose that Uluru be closed to climbers due to its cultural significance. The opposite view would be that this monolith is not owned by the indigenous people and should be shared with visitors – who should be allowed to climb it. Students need to reflect how they would feel if this was part of their cultural background.
- Use the chapter headings to ask questions and check the students' understanding of the content. Use literal questions ('What is a monolith?') and inferential questions ('What impact has tourism had on the area around Uluru?' and ask for the students' opinions ('How would you feel if you were offered kangaroo meat for dinner?').

Maps and Markers

- Use a map of Australia to estimate distances between the places that Mum and Taha visit and discuss map features such as keys, legends, grids and scale.
- Discuss the use of different maps (a street map for tourist attractions, a local area map for national parks, an atlas of Australia to show river systems and borders).
- Discuss the depth marker in the Todd River (p79). Is this an accurate way to measure the depth of water? Why/Why not? What other factors could be measured (time of deepest reading, flow rate of the water, weather forecasts, predictions)?
- Look at the direction marker on top of Uluru (p102). Discuss the purpose of this type of marker. Would it be accurate? How would we represent this information today? Demonstrate how to use and read a compass. Why would this be such an important item for early explorers?

Characters

Taha remains keen to travel and seek out new places and people. He is committed to staying in touch with his neighbour, his teacher and his best friend, Joel. Re-read Taha's response to bush foods (p87). Meanwhile, Mum studies the places to visit in each town and is a careful and reliable parent. In this book, the students are introduced to indigenous characters such as ranger Bart and his daughter Arinya, and Constable Johnson, who is a policeman in Boulia.

Research Topics

- citizenship and immigration
- the Arrernte people
- Channel Country
- the Min Min Lights
- the history of camels in Australia
- native animals (bandicoot, bilby, rock wallaby, mulga parrot)

- tourism at Uluru
- the Ghan
- bush tucker
- the legend of Lasseter's Reef
- the Todd River Regatta
- CB-radio



Useful References

- Tourism agencies
- Local councils, libraries, historical societies
- State automobile clubs – maps and trip planners
- <http://www.globalgourmet.com/destinations/australia/austbush.html> (bush tucker)
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honeypot_ant
- <http://www.aussie-info.com/identity/fauna/bandicoot> (teacher use)
- <http://www.bandicootbooks.com/freeStuff.html> (free downloads)
- <http://www.youtube.com/> (Min Min lights and Waltzing Matilda retold)
- <http://www.outback-australia-travel-secrets.com/camels>
- <http://www.parrots.org/index.php/encyclopedia/wildstatus/budgerigar>
- <http://en.travelnt.com/explore/alice-springs.aspx>
- http://www.northernterritory.visitorsbureau.com.au/visitors_info.html
- 'Food: Gourmet in the Outback' by Amy Middleton, *Australian Geographic* magazine, January 2010
- 'Kings Canyon Rim Walk' by Louise Southerden, *Australian Geographic* magazine, September 2009
- 'Lasseter Demystified and Two German Rouseabouts', Scherer, P.A.S.A.: Scherer, 1996

Our Australia series by Phil Kettle
Illustrations by David Dunstan
Teacher notes by Judi Champion
Edited by Emma Short
Design by Goanna Graphics (Vic) Pty Ltd

Name: _____ Date: _____

Draw a map of Taha's trip. Add pictures, captions or labels.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Write a review about this book.

Title:

Author:

What happens:

My opinion of this book:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Choose a topic or idea from *Our Australia Alice Springs*. Use the Internet, books or other resources to research this topic. Record the information you find on the Oracle Pod below.



BLM 4 Investigating Language

Name: _____ Date: _____

Descriptive adjectives tell us more about a person, place or thing. Choose adjectives to make the following sentences more interesting. The first one has been done for you.

1. Mum had a **great** idea. She decided to explore **amazing** Australia.
2. Mum pulled the campervan over and took out some of her _____ baklava.
3. Taha was _____ amazed by the outback sunset.
4. Uluru is a _____ monolith.
5. Mum and Taha tried eating some _____ foods.
6. The Kata Tjuta area has _____ formations.

Read A.B. 'Banjo' Patterson's poem on pages 41-42. List the words that tell us about bandicoots.



1. Face shape: _____
2. Type of claws: _____
3. How they dig: _____
4. What they eat: _____
5. How they trick dogs: _____

6. What they do if there is a bushfire: _____

BLM 5 A Postcard from Central Australia

Name: _____ Date: _____

Imagine that you are Taha. Write a postcard to a classmate about your trip to central Australia.



Address

Postcode _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

Design a travel brochure. Include an image on the front page and an introduction on Section 1. Include photographs and information about the place your travel brochure is advertising.

**A4 paper turned on its side
3 columns across page**

Heading and illustration

Front Cover

Publishing credits

School name and address

Introduction

Headings

Allow for graphics

5 **6** **1**

2 **3** **4**

Allow space for fold