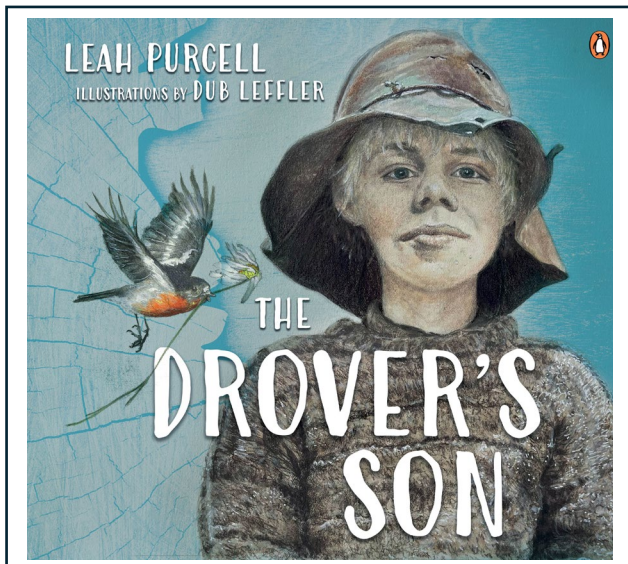




# Teachers' Resources



## PLOT SUMMARY

Set during the late 1800s, *The Drover's Son* follows the story of a family facing the everyday challenges and dangers of an isolated life in the Australian bush. Twelve-year-old Danny lives with his siblings and his heavily pregnant mother. His father is away much of the year droving – a relief for the family, as he drinks too much – but Danny has had to grow up fast. He believes that soon he will have no choice but to leave home and go droving with his father.

When Yadaka, an Aboriginal man, appears and stays to help cut wood for the winter, Danny is drawn to him and finds an unexpected friendship. As Danny and his mother cope with the loss of her baby in childbirth, Yadaka, who has lost his own family under terrible circumstances, becomes both a role model and a father figure to Danny. As Yadaka shares stories and skills and listens to Danny, Danny learns the importance of Country, family and what it means to be good man. And he realises that there is another path for him – one in which a man can be wise and gentle, and a warrior too. He doesn't have to follow his father.

A unique and powerful illustrated book inspired by Leah Purcell's bestselling novel *The Drover's Wife* and Henry Lawson's famous short story.

## RECOMMENDED FOR (ages 8+; years 4 plus)

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### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English • General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding • History/Humanities

### REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A powerful story of the importance of role models, especially for boys • An accessible way to share challenging truths about Australia's history and life on the land • A celebration of stories and culture • A testament to the resilience of Australia's First Nations peoples • Perfect for learning about artistic and literary influences in fiction

### THEMES

- Family bonds and found family • Stories and storytelling • Loss and resilience • Roles and role models • Rites of passage

### PUBLICATION DETAILS

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## The Drover's Son

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leah Purcell AM is a proud Goa, Gunggari, Wakka Wakka Murri woman from Queensland.

She is a playwright, actor, director, filmmaker, producer, screenwriter and author. At the heart of her work are female and First Nations themes, characters and issues. In 2021, she received a Member of The Order of Australia (AM) for her service to performing arts, First Nations youth and culture, and to women. *The Drover's Wife* was originally an award-winning play, written by and starring Purcell, based on the Henry Lawson short story. She was the lead actor, writer, director and a producer of the acclaimed feature film adaptation, *The Drover's Wife The Legend Of Molly Johnson*. Her bestselling and award-winning novel, *The Drover's Wife*, was released in 2019. In 2026, Leah will direct *The Drover's Wife – The Opera*, libretto by Leah Purcell with George Palmer, opening in Brisbane and Sydney. Among her many other film, tv and theatre credits, Leah headlines the recent drama series, *High Country*.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Dub Leffler is a proud Bigambul man. In a career spanning twenty-five years, he has written and illustrated over thirty books for children and taught workshops in over 300 schools nationally and overseas. He has earned many shortlistings and won multiple awards along the way, including the CBCA's Book of the Year in 2019 for the seminal work *Sorry Day* (with Coral Vass). He has collaborated with other artists, including Banksy, Shaun Tan and Quentin Blake to name a few. Celebrated internationally, Dub's illustrations have featured at The Bologna Children's Book Fair in Italy and his work is held in permanent collections around the globe, including The Library of Congress in the US.

### AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Mums, dads, carers and teachers – don't panic when I say this – but when I was young, I didn't like to read! But I love reading now! I failed English at school and found grammar hard to understand. What I *did* love was telling a story. I would write things down with spelling mistakes and commas in all the wrong places, but my yarn was always a good one – and I was encouraged to keep trying.

My mother would read *The Drover's Wife* by Henry Lawson to me when I was a little girl. I would always stop her before the end and proudly recite the famous last line: "Ma, I won't never go a-drovin'." Being read to as a child is such a gift. And thanks to that encouragement – and my love of storytelling – I grew up to become an actor, director, and writer. Over time, that one story my mum read to me has inspired a play, a film, a novel, an opera libretto, a tv series in development and now this picture book. So, thank you, Mum. And thank you, Henry Lawson, for writing a story I could connect with.

That's the trick, really. When you find a story, you can imagine yourself in, reading becomes exciting. That's how it worked for me.

This was another reason I was drawn to *The Drover's Wife* when I was young. My mum would tell me stories about her and her dad, my Grandfather Sam, going droving together. Those yarns stayed with me, making that world feel close and real. Grandfather Sam was nothing like Danny's dad, but when I later re-imagined this story, it felt like I was also honouring my own family's good experience as working drovers.

And just in the last five years, while researching our family history, a photograph surfaced of Grandfather Sam's mother – my great-grandmother, Nancy. In the photo, she is sitting proudly on a horse on her traditional lands of Guwa (Winton). She was only about 14 or 15 years old, and in the early 1900s, they called her a drover.

Knowing this deepened my connection to the story. It reminded me that these weren't just characters in a book. They were real people – strong, resilient and brave. My great-grandmother Nancy was one of them.

Today, being a published author makes me feel proud – especially knowing I once struggled so much with reading. As a writer, I draw deeply from my own family history and from Australian history to inspire my fictional worlds. When I was fourteen, I wanted to understand more about my Aboriginality. Due to government policies, my mother and grandparents were prevented from passing on our culture to me. Through research and listening to my Elders' oral stories, I pieced together our history and found my grounding – culturally,



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spiritually, and creatively. That grounding shapes who I am and the stories I tell.

I hope I can inspire young people who are struggling with reading, and that *The Drover's Son* encourages curiosity about Australia's history.

*The Drover's Son* is set in 1893 on the beautiful Alpine Country of the Monaro Ngarigo and Ngambri Walgalu. It's a yarn about fathers and sons, a mother's fierce and enduring love, and family in all its forms. Above all, it's a story about a time we must not forget – and about the power of stories themselves.

## ILLUSTRATOR'S INSPIRATION

I looked at a lot of pictures from Australia in the 1800s to help me illustrate *The Drover's Son*. I was especially influenced by the paintings of Frederick McCubbin to help with the look and style of the book.

I got my cousin to pose as Yadaka and used Kid Laroi as a loose reference for Danny. When I was drawing and painting *The Drover's Son*, I would listen to the soundtracks from old Westerns, particularly the movie, *For a Few Dollars More* starring Clint Eastwood. I would also listen to recordings of Australian bush sounds while I worked.

To create the illustrations, I used pencil, watercolour paint, coffee and salt.

## NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

**This story, in part, is generalised to protect the traditional and cultural practices of the Monaro Ngarigo and Ngambri Walgalu. The truth-telling is real around the attitudes towards the First Nations peoples.**

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

Please note that some of the issues discussed here might be difficult content for some readers. Most of the notes below are aimed at middle to upper primary.

However, this story is also suitable for more mature study. Some extension questions and resources are also suggested for older readers, with the possibility to use this book as a part of lower high school or even Year 9 and 10 Australian History curriculum The Making of the Modern World and Australia.

## Visual Literacy and artistic influences

The story is told from Danny's point of view. Dub's illustrations do much more than show us what has happened. Explore the use of symbols both in the text and illustrations to interpret, analyse and make meaning of images in context.

### Questions and activities

1. Can you find a little red-chested bird in the illustrations throughout? Who or what do you think the bird represents? Why do you think that? What is the significance of the bird appearing in particular scenes?
2. Find the page with one big tree and one little tree growing underneath it. Do you think this means something? Think about the themes of the book as you consider your answer. Write down your thoughts.
3. Find the page with the bottle and the snake. What is the tone of this image? What does it make you feel? What do you think its inclusion says about Danny's father and Danny's feelings about him?
4. Can you find the images of the mountain daisies in the book? Why do you think Dub has focused on them? Can you find quotes from the text that support your view?

\*

Dub's makes reference to major Australian painters and styles from the 1800s/early 1900s, making this a great jumping off point to explore Australian art of the period.

### Questions and activities

5. Dub has used a similar colour palette and style to one of Australia's most famous painters, *Frederick McCubbin*. Take a look the paintings *Down on his Luck*, *On the Wallaby Track*, *The Pioneer* and *A Bush Burial*. Can you find art in *The Drover's Son* that references McCubbin's style or scenes?
6. After looking at the paintings of Frederick McCubbin, research and write two paragraphs about him. Can tell the class why you think Dub choose him as an influence?
7. Create your own piece of art to reflect on this period of history and how it makes you feel.



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8. Match different types of music to different pages in the book. For example, happy music for happy scenes in the book, or sad music for sad scenes in the book.

Write down other sounds you might hear from things that happen in the story. For example, find the page where Danny is walking alone in the bush. What sounds do you think he can hear? Choose another page in the book and write down what sounds you can imagine.

9. Some of the illustrations are portraits and some are characters in the landscape, but one is a 'collage' of characters and scenes – why do you think Dub has chosen this style to illustrate this particular page?

Research Bogong Moths and write down three facts about Bogongs. What is their connection to Aboriginal people?

10. Talking about art is a combination of describing what is in the image, the artists style and how the combination of both makes you feel.

In groups, chose one illustration and write a paragraph to present to the class. Consider the point of view, the colour palette and style, the mood and how it makes you feel, level of detail, as well as the landscape and the key figures or objects and how they are arranged on the page.

11. Images of drovers feature in some of Australia's most famous paintings. The drover became an icon representing the resilience needed by 'settlers' to survive in the harsh Australian landscape. Look up *A Break Away* (1891) by Tom Roberts and *Droving Into the Light* (1921) by Hans Heysen.

Compare the image of Danny's father droving to these paintings of drovers. How does the vignette on the left-hand page change how we might view the scene? What do you think the drover is a symbol of in *The Drover's Son*? Is the tone and message different to that of the paintings mentioned above?

12. Look up *The Drover's Wife* (1945) by Russell Drysdale. This is one of Australia's most famous paintings. As in Dub and Leah's book, the painting takes the focus away from the drover and focusses on his wife.

Think about the hardships that Molly faces – can you list the dangers and challenges? What words would

you use to describe her character? How has Dub represented that in the images of her?

Look at Dub's image of Molly holding her rifle. Compare and contrast this to Russell Drysdale's representation. In what ways is it similar? Are there significant differences in how she is represented?

13. You can hear some funny kids discussing Russell Drysdale's painting and learn more about it here: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/the-art-show/clever-kids:-the-drovers-wife/10499636>

Can you write your own (more serious) review of this painting? And a review of an image in the book?

## Writing Style and storytelling influences

Leah says this book is 'about the power of stories themselves'. *The Drover's Son* is a perfect place to explore ideas of oral history and 'yarning'.

Oral history is important to all historical enquiry, but especially where written history doesn't represent or deliberately silences certain groups of people.

Australian history in particular draws on storytelling as Aboriginal culture and cultural practices, history, spirituality and knowledge has been passed down orally for over 65,000 years.

1. Does your school have a yarning circle or a discussion circle? Discuss with your teacher what this means and how yarning circles are influenced by Indigenous storytelling practices.

How does sitting in a circle help everyone to contribute? Why?

2. Read the two instances where stories are told around a campfire. Do you have a tradition of storytelling in your family? Can you write down one story or memory that is shared in your family?
3. Read Leah's 'Author's Inspiration' and note down the ways in which she says this story is drawn from her experience of oral storytelling.

In what ways is storytelling important to you? Is there something you have learned from your family stories that is not written down? Is there a story that you were told or was read to you that is very important to you?

4. Leah started her writing career in theatre. She has written *The Drover's Son* from the past-tense point of view of Danny (first-person narration, for example: *In a year, I could be off working, droving with my da and gone from here . . .*)



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Look up the words 'script' and 'monologue'. What are the similarities between *The Drover's Son* text and a script or monologue? What effect does that have on the reader? Do you feel closer to Danny than other characters because of the way the story is written?

5. Answer one of the below:

Who do you identify with in this book? What has made you interested in that person? OR

If you met one of the characters in the story, what would you talk to them about? What questions would you ask them?

6. Think of a different way Leah could have told this story. Choose one scene from the book and try writing it in a different tense and then from another character's point of view. How does this change the storytelling, mood or message?
7. *I remember the snow-white tree trunks on the hillside. The yellowing tufts of autumn tussock grass. The cavernous granite walls to the river below, the dark water indicating its deep depth.*

Leah's descriptions of landscape are very striking and reflect her love of and connection to this part of Australia. When Danny hears Yاداکا describe walking the mountains to 'the sacred spot', he doesn't fully understand, but he thinks of the place described above.

What does the description make you feel? What is it about the description that makes you feel that?

What place would you think of if you were Danny? Write down or tell the group a description of that special place, giving us a strong sense of how you felt there (that might be awe, peace, excitement, connection or anything else).

8. Can you highlight the adjectives (describing words) in the description above?

\*

*The Drover's Son* is influenced by the tradition of Australian bush literature, in particular the work of Henry Lawson in *The Drover's Wife*, a famous short story written in 1892.

Bush literature of the period explored themes such as the challenges of 'frontier' life and 'settlement', but it privileged the experiences of the white 'settlers' and praised their perceived self-reliance and resilience in a

harsh land that needed to be tamed. *The Drover's Son* explores the Aboriginal experience of 'settlement' and highlights the experience of living with and on Country.

## Questions and activities

9. **In the 1800s, drovers were people who rode on horseback to move livestock over long distances from the stations to the sales yards, before the introduction of trains or trucks.**

Drovers still exist, but the job looks very different today. Compare droving in the 1800s to droving today. What are the differences and similarities?

10. Look up the modern dictionary definition of the word 'country'. Then listen to Jude Barlow, Ngannawal Elder talk about what Country means for her at: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/welcome-country>

Brainstorm the ways that Yاداکا's people and his adopted family would use the word 'Country', compared to how the 'settlers' might?

Write your own definition.

11. Read the pages where Danny describes his mother protecting them from the bullock. Compare and contrast to the way that this scene is described in Henry Lawson's story from 1892:

*Again, she fought a mad bullock that besieged the house for a day. She made bullets and fired at him through cracks in the slabs with an old shot-gun. He was dead in the morning. She skinned him and got seventeen-and-sixpence for the hide.*

How does the tone, language and point of view differ? How does Danny choose to tell the story?

## FOR OLDER READERS:

12. Read *The Drover's Wife* by Henry Lawson. Find the examples of Aboriginal characters in the story. Compare and contrast the depiction of Yاداکا in *The Drover's Son* to the way Black characters are depicted in the 1892 story. What is the tone and attitude displayed? What language is used? Who is centred in the story? Are Aboriginal people given names and personal details?



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## Australian history and the Aboriginal experience

As Leah Purcell says in her introductory note, 'This is a story about a time in our history we shouldn't forget.' *The Drover's Son* is set in 1893, on the Alpine Country of the Monaro Ngarigo and Ngambri Walgalu. Their traditional lands are now called the Monaro Tablelands, the Snowy Mountains and the ACT.

*The Drover's Son* is a perfect place to start age appropriate discussions around:

- the Frontier Wars – conflicts and massacres that occurred after the arrival of Europeans to 'disperse' Aboriginal peoples. Danny tells the reader, This is the closest I've ever come to someone like him. The Blacks around here are blamed for everything – not that there are many left. The local men shoot them, poison them or they're allowed to 'disperse' them. That's a word I've learnt. I've heard my da and his mates talk about it.

No one really knows how many Aboriginal people were on the continent at the time of White contact, but it is estimated that up to 100,000 people died in the Frontier Wars. Many more died or suffered due to disease, massacres and government policies. At the time this book is set, Aboriginal deaths were often hidden or not documented.

- Other forms of violence, like race-specific legislation (often called 'protection' by colonial governments). These laws were designed to segregate and restrict Aboriginal people, control their wages, move communities off their land, limit access to culture, break up families and remove children (the Stolen Generations).

### Questions and activities

- During this period, what did it mean to be 'Australian'? How might different people answer that question depending on their cultural background, gender, class, wealth or other factors? How might two characters in this story see their identity differently?
- What do you think the government in the 1890s meant by 'disperse'? Look up the definition in a dictionary and write it down. Do you think Aboriginal

communities wanted to be 'dispersed'? Why did you think they were 'dispersed' and how?

- 'Dispersed' was used as a 'euphemism'. Look up the meaning of that word. Write down three other examples of euphemisms you can think of. Why do we use euphemisms?
- What is the difference between laws, rules and values? Look up each of the definitions and create an infographic answering the questions below.

It is implied that Yadaka has lost his wife, child and adopted family to violence. Was physical violence against the law in the late 1800s? Was it against the rules? Was it against the values of the time? Did the same laws, rules and values apply to everyone?

Yadaka has been forcibly removed from his family as a child and doesn't know if his mother is still alive. Were child removals against the law? The rules? The values of the time? Did the same laws, rules and values apply to everyone?

- You can watch the 2008 Apology to the Indigenous Peoples of Australia, particularly the Stolen Generations on behalf of the people of Australia at Australian Parliament House:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RThkO3XBThs>

Can you name four things that the speech apologises for? What does the Apology promise to do in the future?

Think about a time that you had to give or receive an apology. What do you think an apology should achieve? How should an apology make you feel? Do you think an apology is enough or does there need to be action as well? Does it matter whether we acknowledge wrongs that have happened?

- Yadaka tell us that he doesn't need boots as his people move on to warmer country when the winter comes. But Danny's father says you can't be a 'decent' man without boots.

What do you think the idea of bare feet represents to Danny's father and the other European settlers? Consider that boots are European clothing, essential for European jobs, cost money and that none of the children in this story own any. How might bare feet have been used to imply that Aboriginal peoples were less than the Europeans?



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## FOR OLDER READERS

19. For readers in Years 5/6 and Years 7/8, teachers can find resources and teacher-directed activities dealing with the Frontier Wars at:

<https://shop.aiatsis.gov.au/products/unit-1-frontier-wars-1780s-1920s>

20. You can find more information on the race-specific legislations that affected Indigenous peoples in your state at: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/collection/featured-collections/remove-and-protect>

What legislation would have allowed the authorities to remove Yadaka from his family? Did a similar thing happen to Aboriginal people in your state?

21. It is implied that Yadaka's family and adopted extended family has died by violence. Look at Danny's description of the white attitude to the 'Blacks' and look at the information presented here:

<https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/unsettled/remembering-massacres/map-of-colonial-frontier-massacres/>

Choose your local area or Yadaka's birth or adopted home and draw a timeline reflecting first contact, 'settlement' and the dates of any violence listed on the map.

\*

Australia did not become a 'country' until Federation in 1901. In the late 1800s, the states were separate colonies of the British Empire. While it had originally been intended as a place to put 'convicts' from England, by the time this book is set the Europeans had set out to farm, mine and run cattle and sheep on the land. They fenced and cleared the land of trees.

They did not recognise the rights of the people already living on the land.

22. What can you discover about the Traditional Custodians of the land your school is built on? You might find that your local council has some information or you can refer to:

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

Using your research, write an information text and create a lesson for students a year group younger than you.

23. Can you find on the map above the land of Yadaka's adopted peoples, the Monaro Ngarigo and Ngambri Walgalu? Can you find Yadaka's place of birth, Guugu Yimithirr Country? Is that a long journey on foot? What dangers and challenges do you think he would face along the way?

If Yadaka could send his family in Guugu Yimithirr Country a letter about the journey ahead, what would he say?

24. Look up what the first Europeans in your area used the land for? Was it farming or pasture for sheep or cattle or for mining, housing, industry or as a port? Look up when that happened and see if you can find images of the land before and after 'settlement'. How was it changed?

Write a diary recount from the point of view of someone who visited the land before 'settlement' and after – focus on the difference in the landscape.

25. How do you think European practices, like farming, fences and land ownership affected people like Yadaka's adopted family who travel across wide areas of land throughout the year? How might the clearing of trees and the removal of wildlife affect people who hunt and eat food that naturally grows on the land? How might losing access to rivers and streams affect their diet and cultural practices?

Brainstorm your answers in groups and then write a persuasive letter to the 'settlers' of 1893 to try to help them understand.

## Roles, role models and rites of passage

*The Drover's Son* explores the importance of role models in our lives and how they can influence a young person's development. It's also a great place to start discussions around 'found family' and positive role models.

1. Danny's mum takes on many of the roles that would at that time have been seen as a father's (protector and provider). She is also affectionate, responsible and loving in a way that was traditionally the role of a mother.

In what ways does Molly protect and provide for her children? Write a diary from the point of view of one of the younger children about one of those times.

2. *The Drover's Son* explores the importance of family in providing stability and care. Can you find



# Teachers' Resources

examples of Molly's affection for the children? How do your loved ones protect and care for you? How do they show affection?

3. Danny has a deep connection to his siblings and is considered almost an adult in his family. Can you find three examples of how as a big brother or 'man of the house' he is a role model for them?

Write a narrative (story, script or graphic novel) about the horse ride Danny and his siblings take to town. How might Danny have acted as a role model and responsible adult for them on the journey? Use any genre to tell this story. Be as imaginative as you like.

4. What is implied when Danny tells us of his father, *He drinks a lot. Thank goodness he's away a lot too?* What other descriptions in the book help you to understand how Danny is parented by his father?
5. Brainstorm Danny's relationship with his father and his relationship with his mother, Molly. Based on that, who do you think has the greatest influence on him as a role model? Why?

Taking your notes and what Danny has learned from Yadaka into account, write a letter from Danny to his father, explaining why he *won't never go a-drovin'*.

6. *The Drover's Son* story explores the power of 'found family' in providing role models for a young person outside the family.

Yadaka has been taken from his birth family but later is adopted by what we might call a 'found' or 'chosen' family. Can you think of other examples in books where characters who have lost their biological family but found belonging?

For you, what makes someone 'family'?

\*

Danny has had to grow up fast and at twelve he is *no longer a child, but not yet a man*. The story provides a starting point to discuss 'rites of passage' and rites of passage ceremonies around the world and what roles come with them. A great jumping off point to discuss passing on culture and story, roles and responsibilities and learning adult skills and ways to live.

## Questions and activities

7. Danny believes that when he is thirteen he will be a man and will be expected to go and work as a drover, just as his father had, but after his time with

Yadaka, Danny has a different view of how to be a 'decent' man.

For him and his father the handing over of a pair of adult boots and leaving home for work is a 'rite of passage'. Can you think of any that happen in your life or the lives of people around you?

Write down the definition of 'rites of passage' and write your examples around it in a word cloud.

8. Yadaka offers Danny an alternative rite of passage and a different idea of being a man. Explore the idea of Men's Business as it's portrayed in *The Drover's Son*. What does Yadaka want to teach Danny to equip him to be an adult? Think about what they discuss around family and Country, respect for others, resilience and survival in the bush, self-respect, loyalty and affection.

Together with your teacher, write a DIY guide to being a good adult in the 1800s, following Yadaka's advice.

As a group, find ways to update it to fit your modern life. What would be the modern equivalent of hunting for food for your family be, for example?

9. Create a 'compare and contrast' table showing what you think 'being a man' means to Danny's father and to Yadaka. Think about their different attitudes to home, family, providing food and safety, affection, teaching, self-control, identity and behaviour.

Can you identify the differences between Dannels' dad and Yadaka?

10. What do you think it means to Danny when he and Yadaka share a smile over their 'dirty bare feet'?
11. All cultures have rites of passage around grieving and loss. *The Drover's Son* describes two different ways to grieve: a funeral and a mourning ritual.

*Cried a river, she did. Howlin' like the ragin' wind in a storm. She frightened me a little, but there was also comfort and beauty to the . . .'*

*She looks up, not sure what to call it.*

*'Wailing,' the man says.*

Look up the meaning of a 'ritual'. How do you think each of the ways of mourning helped Molly?



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## The ending

### Questions and activities

1. *She turns to me, clenches a fist, steadying me with a firm grasp on my arm. Then she touches her fist softly to my forehead. She blows through it, whispering, 'Always with you.'*

This action occurs several times in the story. Why do you think Molly uses it in these moments? What comes to mind when you hear the words 'Always with you'?

2. *Because now I know, I don't have to follow my da. 'Ma, I won't never go a-drovin',' I say.*

What does 'droving' represent to Danny here? Why does this make Molly so happy?

## KEY QUOTES

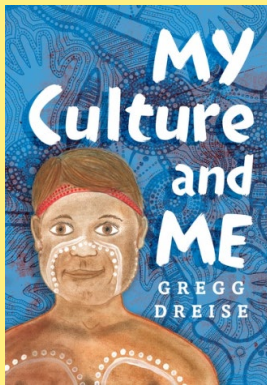
1. Ma looks tired – she can't hide that, but she offers us a little smile. She told me that turning twelve is important: you're no longer a child, but not yet a man. In a year, I could be off working, droving with my da and gone from here . . .
2. I watch Ma sitting in her homemade rocking chair, but there's no baby crying. She's gently rocking back and forth, humming a sorrowful tune.
3. The man takes a small homemade wooden cross, steps forward and drops to his knee. I grab his arm. 'That's my job, mister.'
4. 'I'm twelve, sir.'  
'That means you're ready for men's business,' he says.  
'What's that?' I ask.  
'It's understanding your responsibility to your ma, family, to the land and animals around you. Understanding nature to live by.'
5. 'All those beautiful Black faces still finding things in life to smile about – they gave me hope.
6. 'But a decent man has boots. That's what my da reckons.'  
'It's not what you wear on your feet, Danny. How you carry yourself is what makes a decent man.'  
We look at our dirty bare feet and share a smile.
7. Yadaka shows me how to hold and throw it. My first attempt is terrible, and I wait for him to be impatient or angry, but Yadaka is quick to encourage me.  
So I eagerly try again. And again.
8. It feels so safe. I've never received a hug like this from my da. Then he pushes me gently towards my mother.  
'Look after each other,' Yadaka says, before walking into the scrub.

9. She turns to me, clenches a fist, steadying me with a firm grasp on my arm. Then she touches her fist softly to my forehead. She blows through it, whispering, 'Always with you.'
10. I want to let her know I am here for her, here for Joe Junior, Henry James and Delphi. Because now I know, I don't have to follow my da.  
'Ma, I won't never go a-drovin',' I say.



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## Further reading from Penguin Random House



*My Culture and Me*  
by Greg Dreise

A stirring story about pride, respect and maintaining culture.

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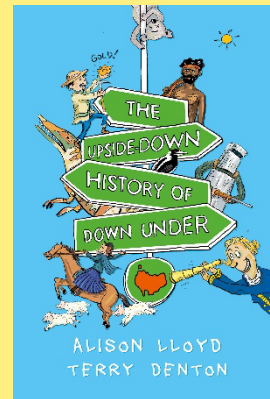
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