

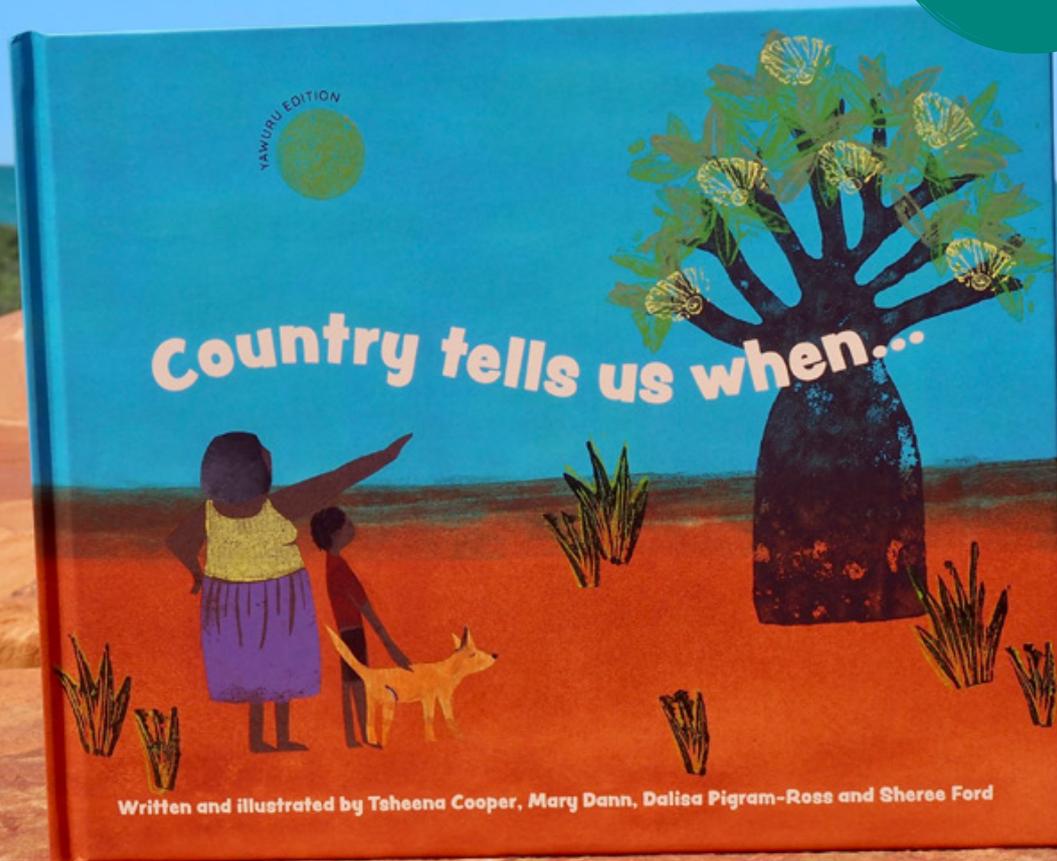
COUNTRY TELLS US WHEN...

Bringing First Nations storytelling into the classroom

Written by Shelley Ware



TEACHER
GUIDE
+ LESSON PLANS



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which you read and share *Country tells us when...* acknowledging their connection to culture and land, sea and sky Country.

We pay respects to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We further acknowledge the Yawuru people, the traditional owners of the lands and waters in and around Rubibi (the town of Broome) where this book was written and illustrated.





Pictured above, left to right: Authors of *Country tells us when...*
Dalisa Pigram-Ross, Mary Dann, Sheree Ford, Tsheena Cooper

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHORS OF *COUNTRY TELLS US WHEN...*

"Some cultures around the world have four seasons that they look out for on a calendar – Summer, Autumn, Winter and Spring. Us Yawuru mob, we don't have four seasons that are told to us by a calendar. We have six seasons and Country tells us when they have arrived by what we feel, see, taste, smell and hear."

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Yawuru people are the traditional owners of the lands and waters in and around Rubibi (the town of Broome). This book idea was conceived by educators Tsheena Cooper, Dalisa Pigram-Ross and Sheree Ford, who were inspired to share important cultural knowledge and language in a story that is both engaging and informative for children.

They have used the medium of block printing to depict the imagery, layering the distinctive colours of the Kimberley as they move through the seasonal changes. First Nations language reclamation is a vital part in ensuring the continuation of cultural knowledge and is a form of empowerment that helps build strong connections in communities.

A MESSAGE FROM SHELLEY WARE

What is Country?

Country is the land which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people belong to. It is not just about the physical sense of land; it is so much more. The connection to Country is deeply spiritual.

Country is a part of the First Nations kinship system and totem system, designed to ensure sustainability for future generations. We consider Country to be a family member that is living and breathing and it is our cultural responsibility to care for Country for the next generations.

We must always listen to Country as it is always telling us something. We must only take what we need and make sure we replenish Country and help it heal when we do.

Acknowledging Country is a way for all to pay respects to the traditional owners and custodians and thank them for caring for Country, the place we call home.

NAIDOC THEME WEEK 2023 - FOR OUR ELDERS.

This year's NAIDOC week theme *For our Elders* is about acknowledging the role Elders have played and continue to play in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families every day. They guide our generations and pave the way for a better future for our people.

The book *Country tells us when...* lends itself beautifully to this year's NAIDOC theme as it celebrates the relationship within the kinship systems. It highlights the Yawuru people's connection to their Elders – their knowledge holders – who pass their knowledge on to the next generations to strengthen their connection to Country and culture. Read more about the [2023 NAIDOC theme](#).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

This guide supports teachers as they explore the language and themes of *Country tells us when...*, a bilingual book written in English and the Yawuru language. It is [available from the Indigenous Literacy Foundation](#), and can also be accessed via [audio recording](#) which is read by one of the authors, Dalisa Pigram–Ross.

To prepare, it is recommended that teachers complete the following professional reading, listening and viewing.

Create a culturally safe space in your classroom

Take some time to [read this valuable resource from SBS Learn](#) on how to create a culturally safe space for First Nations children in your classroom in a way that will benefit your whole school community.

Listen to the story

On the back cover of the book, available through the [Indigenous Literacy Foundation](#), you will see a QR code to access and listen to Dalisa Pigram–Ross read *Country tells us when...* in English and Yawuru. You can also [listen to the audio recording](#), so you can learn how to say the Yawuru words correctly.

Explore Dadirri

Weather permitting, practise Dadirri everyday outside on Country. You may wish to explore the practice of Dadirri – inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. [Watch this video](#) with Elder Miriam Rose Ungunmerr–Baumann of the Ngangiwumirr language group as she helps you learn the practice of listening to Country and being present and more aware of the world you live in.

Practise Dadirri every day out on Country. Weather permitting, you may choose to play the short video at the start to help them focus, then allow them five minutes to continue in silence, to become more aware of what they can hear, smell, feel and see while sitting on Country.

Prepare resources

- *Country tells us when...* by Tsheena Cooper, Mary Dann, Dalisa Pigram–Ross and Sheree Ford
- [Audio with English and Yawuru reading of the book](#)
- [Yawuru season wheel](#)
- [Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country – Reconciliation Australia](#)
- [Map of Indigenous Australia | AIATSIS](#)



CURRICULUM LINKS

	Australian Curriculum v9.0	Australian Curriculum v8.4
Cross Curriculum Priorities	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures v9.0	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures v8.4
Country/Place	First Nations communities of Australia maintain a deep connection to, and responsibility for, Country/Place and have holistic values and belief systems that are connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. A_TSICP1	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to, and responsibility for, Country/Place. OI.2
		Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually and intellectually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways. OI.3
Culture	First Nations Australian societies are diverse and have distinct cultural expressions such as language, customs and beliefs. As First Nations Peoples of Australia, they have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural expressions, while also maintaining the right to control, protect and develop culture as Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. A_TSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups. OI.4
	First Nations Australians' ways of life reflect unique ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. A_TSIC2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing. OI.5

LESSON OVERVIEW

- Lesson 1:** Connecting to Country through the senses
- Lesson 2:** First Nations literacy study – *Country tells us when...*
- Lesson 3:** Yawuru language and location study
- Lesson 4:** Different ways of seeing – connecting place and time
- Cross-curriculum/extension:** Optional activities for further exploration of themes

These lessons can be used in this order or you can use them according to the needs of your classroom and school. They are a guide to enrich and extend the knowledge of First Nations seasons and the role Elders play in the lives of First Nations people.



CONNECTING TO COUNTRY THROUGH THE SENSES

Duration: 30–40 minutes

Resources

- [Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country – Reconciliation Australia](#)
- [Yarning Circles – Wingaru](#)

Learning intentions

In this lesson we will:

- learn about how First Nations people connect to Country.
- connect to Country in your own way.
- describe Country using your senses.

What is a yarning circle?

Explain the function and purpose of a yarning circle to your class and practise this as often as possible in many different lessons. Yarning circles are an important part of First Nations culture as they allow people to have their say in an informal conversation without judgement.

Everyone sits together in a circle, all at the same level facing each other and together you build trustful relationships. Yarning circles help connect students as a community as they respectfully listen and learn from each other.

For more information visit [Yarning Circles – Wingaru](#).

Yarning circle discussion questions

- Do you know what Western season we are currently in?
- Do you know what local First Nations season we are currently in?
- How can you tell a season has changed?
- What Country is this school located on?
- What does it mean to be connected to Country and to respect Country?
- How do you think you connect to Country?

Connecting to Country

- After your discussion, take your class outside to sit and observe Country. If the weather allows, they can take their shoes off and sit or lie down on Country.
- Ask them to close their eyes or bow their heads and share in an Acknowledgment of Country together. If you have not written one as a class before, use Reconciliation [Australia's Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country guide](#) until you create your own meaningful version.
- Once you have finished your Acknowledgement of Country, ask the students to sit still and listen, look, smell and feel Country. Encourage Dadirri – deep listening and quiet, still awareness – this may be new or you may have practised this a few times in the classroom before.
- Return to the classroom and ask your students what they heard, saw, smelled and felt when sitting and listening on Country. Ask your students to record their observations using words or drawings.
- Invite students to share their observations and compile them on a large piece of paper. Display it in the classroom so you or the students can continue adding to it as they feel a deeper connection to Country throughout the year. These words can be used in their daily writing to help express their feelings and connections.
- Explain that being observant and using all of our senses can help us have a strong connection to Country. This is an important part of First Nations peoples' connection to Country – being aware of the land, waters, animals and weather.
- You should regularly take your class outside to listen to and feel Country so they can build a connection to Country that is authentic and meaningful.

LESSON 2

FIRST NATIONS LITERACY STUDY - COUNTRY TELLS US WHEN...

Duration: 30–60 minutes

Resources

- *Country tells us when...* by Tsheena Cooper, Mary Dann, Dalisa Pigram–Ross and Sheree Ford
- [Audio with English and Yawuru reading of the book](#)

Learning intentions

In this lesson we will:

- read literature created by First Nations people.
- learn how the people of Yawuru know the seasons by observing Country.
- describe the similarities and differences of literature about seasons from other cultures.

Before reading/listening

Show your students the cover of *Country tells us when...* and ask:

- What do you think the story is going to be about?
- What do you notice about the two people on the cover?
- Where do you think this story is set?
- How can Country tell us things?

During reading/listening

Read *Country tells us when...* aloud to the class or listen to the story using the [audio recording](#) in Yawuru and English. Be sure to get excited and loud when the Yawuru Seasons are being read out. You may even like to make actions for the animals and insects so when you revisit this book your students will engage with enthusiasm and fun!

During reading, stop at the spread of the four seasons. Ask students what they know about the four seasons: summer, autumn, winter and spring.

Stop at all the pages where the new season is announced: It's Man–gala time, It's Marrul time, It's Wirralburu time, It's Barrgana time, It's Wirilburu time and It's Laja time. When you stop each time, ask them what season they think it is and why?

Ask your students to identify how many seasons were in the book – six. Compare this to the four seasons you spoke of at the start of the book. What are their initial thoughts about this?

After reading

Ask questions to check for understanding and explore some of the themes of the book.

- How do we know when the four seasons start and finish in the Western four–season calendar?
- How do the Yawuru people know when a season stops and starts?
- What do you notice are similar in each season?
- What are the Yawuru people watching on Country to learn when the seasons change?
- Who was telling the young person about what Country tells us?
- What role has this Elder played in the child's life?
- What was your favourite Yawuru season and why?

Ask them if they enjoyed learning about First Nations seasons. If they did you may choose to source a wide range of picture books about seasons from other cultures including First Nations and other authors from the northern and southern hemisphere with a range of climate zones.

Read the books to the class or allow older students to read independently. The [Strong Nations](#) website will help you source First Nations season books from around the world.

LESSON 3

YAWURU LANGUAGE AND LOCATION STUDY

Duration: 30–40 minutes

Resources

- [Map of Indigenous Australia | AIATSIS](#)
- [Yawuru Language – Nyamba Buru Yawuru](#)

Learning intention

In this lesson we will:

- learn where Yawuru Country is located.
- understand the importance of keeping First Nations languages alive.
- learn some Yawuru language.

Where is Yawuru Country?

Ask your students if they know where Yawuru Country is. What clues could they get from the book to help them guess where Yawuru Country is, if they don't know? Use the [AIATSIS map](#) to locate Yawuru Country together, using the clues from the story to help you. Yawuru is located in and around the Rubibi (the town of Broome).

You may have children in your class who have been to Rubibi. Ask what Yawuru season they thought it was when they visited and how they can tell now that they have read the book *Country tells us when...*

Using Google Maps to locate Rubibi allow your students time to explore what the Country and surrounding Country of Rubibi is like. Watch videos online of Rubibi, so your students can see what the Country looks like during different seasons too.

Locate the Country your school is located on using the [AIATSIS map](#). Display the map in your class highlighting both locations. Add information around the map as you learn things about each Country, seasons, culture, traditions and practices to show the differences and similarities for others to learn too, when they visit your classroom.

Yawuru language

In a yarning circle ask your students, if they knew that 2022–2032 was declared The Decade of Indigenous Languages by the United Nations General Assembly. Ask them if they know what this means and why they think it was declared? Why would it be important to focus on Indigenous languages around the world?

Share with them by reading *Country tells us when...* that they are celebrating Yawuru language in this special decade and that they are helping keep the endangered language of Yawuru alive. That is something to be proud of.

Visit the [Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre](#) to learn more.

- Create your own Yawuru language cards writing the Yawuru words and make sure to draw a picture or description next to each word to help prompt them.
- Use the language cards to play memory or snap games.
- Make posters in the classroom of each Yawuru seasons, write the words and draw the pictures of each season on them.
- Older students can create digital Yawuru language flashcards using Microsoft PowerPoint or Google Slides or create Kahoot games that can be played by the whole class to test their knowledge of the Yawuru words.



LESSON 4

DIFFERENT WAYS OF SEEING - CONNECTING PLACE AND TIME

Duration: 30–40 minutes

Resources

- Invite a Local Elder or respected community member to share knowledge of the local First Nations seasons with your class.
- Conventional Western calendar
- [Yawuru season wheel](#)

Learning intention

In this lesson we will:

- engage with local First Nations community.
- interpret information from the local First Nations season wheel.
- compare different ways of describing and representing time.
- create a local First Nations season wheel for the Country you learn on.

Yawuru seasonal calendar

Look at the Yawuru season wheel at the back of the book [or online](#) and revisit that the Yawuru people have six seasons. Run through the calendar and months of the year indicating approximately when each season falls. Guide students as they describe and interpret the representation of time on the season wheel.

- What is represented on the season wheel?
- What are the pictures of?
- Why do you think these colours were chosen for each part of the wheel?
- Do you notice anything else interesting about the season wheel?

Ways of representing time

Display the season wheel and a conventional Western calendar.

- What information is found on both calendars?
- What is unique to each one?
- Is there a different purpose for each type of calendar?

For older students, you may choose to explore different calendar representations from other cultures.

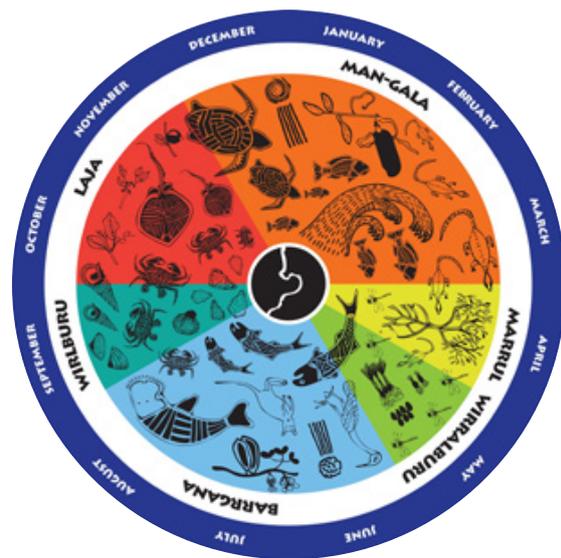
Season wheel – The Country I learn and play on

Invite a local First Nations Elder or respected community member to your school to share the local First Nations season with your students. If this is not possible, you may have to do some research online or enquire at your local council to identify which First Nation season and Country they are currently on.

Complete a whole class First Nations season wheel for the Country their school is built on. Use the observations from Lesson 1 to draw and label the wheel for your current season. Revisit the wheel throughout the year as local seasons change and add your observations to the class First Nations seasons wheel, to further connect to Country. Have the class take home their own First Nations seasons wheel to share and complete with their families.

Further exploration for older students

Explore the detailed information and [Yawuru season wheel](#). Take note of the activities of the Yawuru communities during each season. Observe the information that is not represented on the season wheel. Individually or in pairs, have students create a more detailed Yawuru season wheel incorporating weather and activities.



Permission to use the Yawuru seasonal calendar is granted by "Yawuru Native Title Holders Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC ICN 7033"

CROSS-CURRICULUM/EXTENSION

Optional activities for further exploration of themes

Elders

This year's NAIDOC theme is For Our Elders and is about respecting and honouring the Elders in our lives and school community. *Country tells us when...* shows us how a Yawuru Elder is taking a young person through the seasons and passing on knowledge. Ask your students:

- What is an Elder?
- Are all old people Elders?
- Why was the Elder in *Country tells us when...* teaching the young child the seasons? Why is this important?
- What knowledge has been passed onto them personally from an Elder or older person?
- Do they have Elders in their culture or community? And what role do they play?

Local First Nations Elder

Once you have invited a local Elder into your classroom to talk about the First Nations seasons of the Country your school is built on:

- Ask for permission to create a local First Nations season book using English and their local language to create their own book or posters to share with others. Be inspired by the amazing block printing illustrations in *Country tells us when...* when creating your own.
- Once a local Elder has shared with you the local First Nations seasons, keep reminding your children throughout the year what to look out for when the seasons are changing. This will help to embed First Nations culture and history into your classroom year round.
- Be sure to put a sign on your classroom door so others can learn what the current local First Nations season is too.

MINIBEASTS

If you are studying Minibeasts in your classroom this is a perfect book to expand their knowledge of how First Nations people take note of the arrival and disappearance of certain minibeasts to help determine the change of season.

CROSS-CURRICULUM/EXTENSION

Optional activities for further exploration of themes

Yawuru connection to Country video

As a class watch this [Yawuru Cultural Program video](#) which highlights accessing liyan (feeling) and nijiniiji (connection) that connect to the Yawuru ways of janyba (sharing) with others the Yawuru way of listening, feeling, seeing, tasting and smelling Country.

Discuss in a yarning circle how this is similar or different to how they are currently connecting to Country and what they learnt from the video to help them connect on a deeper level.

Art – block painting

Study the amazing block printing used to illustrate the book, *Country tells us when...* Ask your students to create their own block print or potato block printing that represents the current season and Country their school is on.

Then, using the word list you created as a class, add words to their artwork expressing their connection to Country. Display for others to see your students' strong connection too.

After reading

Ask questions to check for understanding and explore some of the themes of the book.

- How do we know when the four seasons start and finish in the Western four-season calendar?
- How do the Yawuru people know when a season stops and starts?
- What do you notice are similar in each season?
- What are the Yawuru people watching on Country to learn when the seasons change?
- Who was telling the young person about what Country tells us?
- What role has this Elder played in the child's life?
- What was your favourite Yawuru season and why?

Ask them if they enjoyed learning about First Nations seasons. If they did you may choose to source a wide range of picture books about seasons from other cultures including First Nations and other authors from the northern and southern hemisphere with a range of climate zones.

Read the books to the class or allow older students to read independently. The Strong Nations website will help you source First Nations season books from around the world.

LIFECYCLES

Research the Lifecycles of the plants and animals mentioned in *Country tells us when...* so that children build a deeper connection to the Yawuru seasons and can see the role local wildlife and their lifecycles play in the Yawuru seasons.

CROSS-CURRICULUM/EXTENSION

Optional activities for further exploration of themes

Yawuru language – lower primary

- Yawuru is an endangered language. As a class, create a Yawuru picture language dictionary to have in your classroom to help keep the Yawuru language alive all year round.
- Write a poem sharing their knowledge of the Yawuru seasons, or their favourite Yawuru season and include some Yawuru language.

Yawuru language – upper primary

Spend some time on the [Mabu Buru/Healthy Country](#) website, reading about the amazing projects happening on Yawuru Country to preserve culture and to keep Country healthy. In partners, for one minute each share what you learnt and how it impacted you.



Extending into the community

Invite your family, friends and community along to listen to a reading/performance of *Country tells us when...* at assembly or a special classroom or year level performance.

- Start off by sharing what your class has learnt about the Yawuru people, seasons and language.
- Share some of their work so they can see what your students have created together.
- Let your audience know about the endangered Yawuru language and about The Decade of Indigenous Languages we are currently in.
- Read the book aloud (It could be yourself, a student or different students taking turns.)
- While the book is being read, the rest of the class can act out the words for everyone to enjoy.
- To help with your reading/performance you may make your own Yawuru season masks, small stick puppets or large drawings of the seasons, to hold up or even create costumes to fit the seasons – whatever works for you and your class.
- Invite the local newspaper into your class, so you can share what your students have learnt about the Yawuru seasons and language with the wider community.

SUSTAINABILITY

Did you know the totem system within First Nations kinship systems is designed so that every individual is given a plant or animal so they are preserved, shared and are sustainable for future generations?

ASSESSMENT AND REFLECTION

English: Literature and contexts

Support students to write a book review by providing appropriate scaffolds, structures and language. The following is an example of a structure that could be adapted for different age groups.

1. Description

Describe the book and give a summary of the story.

[Sentence starter: *Country tells us when ...* is a picture book about]

2. Recommendation

Explain what you learnt and who should read this book and why.

[Sentence starters: This book taught me
.....
I think should read this book because
.....]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

Students create a postcard to send to the [Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre](#). On one side of the postcard, they write their favourite Yawuru words and season, and what they learnt about the Yawuru seasons. On the other side, draw an illustration or do some block printing of the current First Nations season on the Country on which your school is built.



OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

[Home – Nyamba Buru Yawuru](#)

[International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022 – 2032](#)

[Dadirri – Miriam Rose Foundation](#)

[Aboriginal Elders: Understanding how to be an Ally to Aboriginal Elders](#)

[Indigenous seasonal calendars – CSIRO](#)

[Kinship Module – The University of Sydney](#)

[Social & emotional wellbeing – AIHW Indigenous MHSPC](#)

GLOSSARY OF YAWURU WORDS

WILDLIFE WORDS

birndany – stingray
gudurrwany – brolga
gurlibil – green sea turtle
janga – creek oyster
jarlangardi – goanna
jimbu – eggs
jurru – snake
ngamagarri – white cockatoo
nimanburr – flying fox
walag – frog
walgawalga – bluenose salmon
wanggaja – mud crab
wiyawiya – dragonfly
yari – humpback whale

WEATHER WORDS

manyja wula – heavy rain
ngugngug – dark storm clouds
yaman – sea breeze from the west

BURU/COUNTRY WORDS

bubujina gardgu – long-fruited bloodwood flower
bubujina gunurru – white gum flowers
Buru – Country
Gumanyba – The Seven Sisters Constellation
jirrbirliny – bush bauhinia flower
ngarrangarra – cliffs
rirrga – coals
rumarra – sun
Wirdu nagula – big tides
yaminyarri – kakadu plum

EMOTIONS

janyba – sharing (from Yawuru cultural program video)
liyan – feeling
nijiniji – connection (from yawuru cultural program video)
wirriya – happy

YAWURU SEASONS

Barrgana
Laja
Man-gala
Marrul
Wirlburu
Wirralburu



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Australia Post and the Indigenous Literacy Foundation would like to acknowledge and thank the authors of *Country tells us when...*, Tsheena Cooper, Mary Dann, Dalisa Pigram–Ross and Sheree Ford, for granting permission to feature their book, both the story and illustrations, in this Teacher Guide.

MABU YAWURU NGAN-GA LANGUAGE CENTRE

The story and illustrations of *Country tells us when...* that are shared in this Teacher Guide contain traditional knowledge of the Yawuru people, and have been presented and published with the consent of the knowledge custodians. We thank and acknowledge the support of the Mabu Yawuru Ngan-ga Language Centre for their contribution to and support of this Teacher Guide.

The authors of *Country tells us when...* acknowledge Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, of the Ngangiwumirr language group for the video about Dadirri referenced throughout this Teacher Guide. For more information about Dadirri and Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, visit www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au

All links were valid at time of publication. As some content on the websites used in this guide are not owned by Australia Post or the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, hyperlinks may cease to function.

June 2023

