

# Magabala Books • Teacher Notes

## Big Fella Rain

Written by Beryl Webber

Illustrated by Fern Martins



Teacher Notes prepared by Christina Wheeler

### OVERVIEW

*Big Fella Rain* is a celebration of northern Australia as animals, birds, trees and a parched earth awaiting the first rain. It is almost as if country stands still as the sparse yet evocative text pays homage to the transition from dry season to wet season in a country that is like no other place in the world.

Fern Martins illustrations seamlessly portray the dramatic skies, the thirsty animals and tiny creatures whose very existence rely on the monsoonal changes. Her exquisite rendering of the big landscape against the subtle shifts in the environment have a timeless quality that will capture the hearts of all readers.

- Illustrates the dramatic and unique environment of northern Australia
- Lyrical language tells a story
- Australian animals reflected in the monsoonal images

### THEMES

- Seasons and Weather
- Northern Australia – Environment and Ecosystems
- Aboriginal Culture and Artwork

### AUDIENCE AND WRITING STYLE

Written in present tense, *Big Fella Rain* describes the impact the yearly rains have on the wildlife and environment of northern Australia. Stunning illustrations combined with lyrical language help to create a celebration of the relief monsoonal rains bring to Mother Earth. Aimed at an early childhood audience, it is suitable both as a read-aloud text and as one for independent readers.

### LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

This book and the classroom activities provided are primarily relevant to the following areas of the Australian Curriculum:

Learning area	Year level
English	Years F-3
Science	Years F-1
HASS (Geography)	Year 1
The Arts (Visual Arts)	Years F-2

The appendix highlights relevant content descriptions and cross-curriculum priorities that relate to the text and classroom ideas provided.

### CULTURAL NOTES

For information about teaching Australian Indigenous content see [Teaching Indigenous content with Magabala Books](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR

**Beryl Webber** is descended from the Gunggari people of southern Queensland. Her father was a dam sinker and she grew up on stations. Her family had a keen awareness of when the 'big fella rain' was coming because it often meant they had to prepare for flooding. Beryl works in the health industry and she loves to write. This is her first children's picture book.

**Fern Martins** is a descendant of the Ngarabul people of northern New South Wales and the Waki Waki people of the southern coastal area of Queensland. She has exhibited at the National Gallery of Australia and was a cofounder of Boomalli, the Sydney Aboriginal Artists Collective. Fern has illustrated several children's picture books including *The Toast Tree* (Corina Martin, Magabala Books, 2015).

## CLASSROOM IDEAS

- Before reading, examine the cover and title of the book. Make predictions about the story, giving reasons for your ideas.
- Using both the illustrations and the written text on the first page opening, discuss the approaching storm. Why does the author say 'lightning flashes through liquorice clouds'? How does her use of figurative language add to the text? What other examples of figurative language are used in *Big Fella Rain*?
- Select one of the animals featured in *Big Fella Rain*. Retell the story in the role of this animal.
- Discuss the way in which the author has used a range of simple, complex and compound sentences to vary the pace of the story. Which type of sentence do you find grabs your attention the most? Why?
- Compile a class word wall of vocabulary featured in *Big Fella Rain*. Use these words in your writing.
- Compose a poem to retell what happens when the monsoons come.
- Recreate your favourite page opening, carefully adopting the illustrator's style in your drawings.
- Using an X Chart, brainstorm words and phrases associated with storms and heavy rain. Use these ideas to write your own piece of description about the type of weather depicted in *Big Fella Rain*.
- On a map of Australia, locate the regions affected by monsoonal rains. Find your school's location in relation to northern Australia <https://media1.britannica.com/eb-media/78/118378-004-A986F0BE.jpg>
- Use the following websites to take basic notes about the Wet and Dry seasons.
  - <https://www.questacon.edu.au/burarra-gathering/extra-information/wet-and-dry-seasons>
  - <http://academickids.com/encyclopedia/index.php/Monsoon>
  - Teachers can read more in-depth information about the Wet and Dry seasons at the following site <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2005/11/17/2043065.htm>
- Using an app such as Explain Everything, share your findings about monsoons and the impact they have on northern Australia.
- View the following clip from Splash ABC that explains Indigenous seasons across northern Australia <http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/1771788/indigenous-seasons-across-northern-australia>
- Using the search term 'wet and dry seasons in northern Australia' on Google Images, locate photos of the animal life of northern Australia at these times. Create a photo journal to share your understanding of these seasons, writing a sentence or two about how the wet season affects each animal in your journal.
- Write a reflection sharing how you feel before, during and after heavy storms.
- Discuss the importance of the Wet season in Aboriginal culture. What is the connection between Indigenous culture and Mother Earth?
- How do the illustrations convey the animals' joy at the monsoons coming?
- Create your own illustrations about the monsoonal rains, using the style of Fern Martins' artwork as a guide.
- Which is your favourite page opening in *Big Fella Rain*? Share your ideas with a friend.
- How does your local climate and environment compare with that featured in *Big Fella Rain*?
- Research different types of clouds using a site such as [http://www.ducksters.com/science/earth\\_science/clouds.php](http://www.ducksters.com/science/earth_science/clouds.php). Using figurative language, write sentences to describe different types of clouds. Accompany your writing with illustrations.

## APPENDIX - LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

Year	Curriculum Area
F	<p><b>English</b></p> <p><b>Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise that texts are created by authors who tell stories and share experiences that may be similar or different to students' own experiences (<a href="#">ACELT1575</a>)</li> <li>Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in texts (<a href="#">ACELT1783</a>)</li> <li>Identify some features of texts including events and characters and retell events from a <a href="#">text</a> (<a href="#">ACELT1578</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Science</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily and seasonal changes in our <a href="#">environment</a> affect everyday life (<a href="#">ACSSU004</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>The Arts (Visual Arts)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACAVAR109</a>)</li> <li>Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander <a href="#">artists</a> (<a href="#">ACAVAM106</a>)</li> </ul>
1	<p><b>English</b></p> <p><b>Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovate on familiar texts by using similar characters, repetitive patterns or vocabulary (<a href="#">ACELT1832</a>)</li> <li>Recreate texts imaginatively using drawing, writing, performance and digital forms of communication (<a href="#">ACELT1586</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Science</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Observable</a> changes occur in the sky and landscape (<a href="#">ACSSU019</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>HASS (Geography)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The weather and seasons of places and the ways in which different cultural groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, describe them (<a href="#">ACHASSK032</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>The Arts (Visual Arts)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACAVAR109</a>)</li> <li>Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander <a href="#">artists</a> (<a href="#">ACAVAM106</a>)</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>English</b></p> <p><b>Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss how depictions of characters in print, sound and images reflect the contexts in which they were created (<a href="#">ACELT1587</a>)</li> <li>Discuss the characters and settings of different texts and explore how language is used to present these features in different ways (<a href="#">ACELT1591</a>)</li> <li>Innovate on familiar texts by experimenting with character, setting or plot (<a href="#">ACELT1833</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>The Arts (Visual Arts)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (<a href="#">ACAVAR109</a>)</li> <li>Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander <a href="#">artists</a> (<a href="#">ACAVAM106</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>Cross-Curriculum Priority</b> – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures; Sustainability	