



BRAVE LIKE BUNJI

Written by JAKE GABLONSKI

Illustrated by SAMANTHA CAMPBELL

RECOMMENDED FOR: Ages 4–8 YEARS OLD (PRESCHOOL & LOWER PRIMARY)

GENRE: Children's Picture Book

THEMES: identity, belonging, culture, Country, family, friendship, nature, developing self-confidence, courage to be yourself, wellbeing and support

CURRICULUM LEARNING AREAS:

- English: Literature, literacy and language
- HASS: Geography
- The Arts: Visual Arts/Music/Drama/Dance/Media Arts
- Cross-Curriculum Priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures/Sustainability
- General Capabilities: Intercultural understanding, Personal and social capability

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We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay respect to all Elders past and present and to all who continue to carry culture, connection and storytelling into the future.

ABOUT THE BOOK

When Bunji runs away from school, he doesn't realise that a rainbow lorikeet is about to take him on an incredible adventure. As he soars over Nitmiluk Gorge and feels the rhythms of the environment supporting him, Bunji discovers that he *can* be brave if he shows his true colours with pride.

Brave Like Bunji is a story written from the heart by Wiradjuri man Jake Gablonski, beautifully illustrated by acclaimed Dagoman artist Samantha Campbell and set on the traditional lands of the Jawoyn, Dagoman and Wardaman people of the Katherine region of northern Australia.



ABOUT JAKE GABLONSKI'S INSPIRATION

'When I was a young boy I had a pet rainbow lorikeet named Wally, who lived freely outside a cage. Wally was bold, cheeky and fiercely protective of me and our home environment. Once, while I was lying on the ground talking to him, he bit me on the lip –his own odd way of teaching me about resilience. It was in his nature to be unapologetically loud, bold and of course colourful, planting the seed of those same qualities I was learning to find in myself. Reflecting on his presence in my life reminded me that being unique wasn't something to hide. It was something to celebrate. Wally was a big part of the inspiration behind *Brave Like Bunji*.

'I've always had a love for writing down my thoughts and what I feel, immersing myself in the power of sharing and storytelling. But in developing this story, I knew I wanted to harness that passion and share a gentle reminder that it's okay to feel big feelings. And when you work through those feelings and lean on the support around you, it becomes an invitation to listen to your heart's rhythm and be guided to that connection within yourself, and to take care of that. I also wanted to acknowledge the beautiful Jawoyn Country I grew up on, and how it helped shape the person I have become as well as drawing on the wisdom of my own connection to culture. As a young person, I often felt shy and unsure of where I fit in. But I found comfort in exploring the world around me. There were many hours I'd sit and ponder what I felt.'

Note on the usage of 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples': Some Traditional Custodians prefer the term 'First Nations Peoples', others prefer 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples', and others prefer 'Indigenous Peoples'. For the purposes of these notes we have used the term used in the Australian Curriculum Cross-curriculum Priority. We encourage you to find out who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which your school sits and what their preferred terminology is before the lesson so you can share this with your students. Not all of these terms are acceptable to use in every Country!

Please consider the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in your classroom who may feel connected to the story and wish/not wish to share their own experiences.

ASSESSABLE CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

BEFORE READING

Here are some discussion ideas that can be talked about with students before reading *Brave Like Bunji*:

- Who were the first peoples to live in Australia?
- Do you know how long ago they arrived? [Current research indicates 65,000 years ago]
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are thriving cultures today. Why do you think it is important to listen to and learn from them today?
- Have you ever seen or heard an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander story, song, or dance? What was it like?
- Introduce *Brave Like Bunji* to the class as a new story by Aboriginal creators Jake Gablonski and Samantha Campbell.
- You may wish to mention that this is a story about connection and feelings.

ENGLISH

LITERATURE/LITERACY/LANGUAGE

Cover Discussion Ideas

- What is the first thing you notice on the cover?
- Can you recognise what sort of bird is shown? [*A rainbow lorikeet*]
- Can you see another rainbow anywhere on the cover?

- How does a rainbow make you feel? Happy or sad? Why?
- Look at the colours on the bird's wings. What do they remind you of? Have you ever seen these colours together before, maybe on a flag? [*Explain that these colours are very special – they're the colours of the Australian Aboriginal flag! The black represents the Aboriginal people, the red represents the earth and the spiritual connection to the land, and the yellow represents the sun.*]
- What do you think the boy is thinking or feeling while he is riding the bird?
- What questions would you like to ask the boy in the picture?
- What do you think will happen in the story?
- How does the cover make you feel: excited, calm, curious about the story inside?

Comprehension Questions

Read the story, turning the pages so students can look at the illustrations. Once finished, ask students what they liked about the story, what was their favourite part and how the story made them feel?

Read the story again slowly. Once finished, ask everyone to stand up and play the *Hands on your Head/Hands on your Knees* game. This is where you say something about the story and students show if they think the statement is TRUE by putting their hands on their head or FALSE by putting their hands on their knees.

1. The boy in the story is named Bunji. [T]
2. Bunji ALWAYS loves playing footy during recess. [F]
3. Bunji ran to the riverbank because he was sad that some of his school friends laughed at him. [T]
4. Wylla is a bird. [T]
5. Wylla teaches Bunji that his heart has a rhythm – like the waterfalls called Leliyn – and that he can find calm when things feel big or confusing by putting his hand on his chest and listening to it. [T]
6. Wylla teaches Bunji that it is better that humans are all exactly the same. [F]
7. Wylla flies over Nitmiluk Gorge to show Bunji that the rocks there support the river in the same way as Bunji can find support all around him. [T]
8. Wylla came from the Dreaming to help Bunji learn to connect with himself when he felt down and lost. [T]
9. Wylla teaches Bunji that showing your true colours with pride is something you should never, EVER, do. [F]
10. Bunji showed he was brave by telling his friends that he'd rather play jump rope than footy. [T]

Discussion/Writing/Drawing Activity: Bravery

Help students understand that everyone has different interests and that being brave means being yourself, even when others make different choices. Prompt discussion with the following questions:

- Why did Bunji play footy at first?
- What did Bunji really want to do?
- How did Bunji feel when he was pretending to like the same things as everyone else?
- What happened when he told his friends he wanted to jump rope instead?
- What did Bunji learn about being different?
- What do you think the word *bravery* means?
- Can a person be brave and scared at the same time?
- Does being brave always mean doing something big and dangerous? Or can small things be brave too?

Invite students to write a short paragraph about a time when they did something even though it felt a little scary or hard? Allow a little time for reflection and give examples of simple things, such as asking a question in class or catching the bus by themselves for the first time. Encourage them to explain in their writing how they felt before and after doing their brave thing.

Encourage students to draw a face to show how they felt *before* the brave moment and another face to show how they felt *after*.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HISTORIES AND CULTURES

- After reading *Brave Like Bunji* together, pause on the final page where Bunji falls asleep feeling the rhythm of his heart, steady and strong, like the rivers and waterfalls where he belongs, and talk with students about this idea – that a person's heart and sense of self can be deeply connected to a special place.

Encourage students to think about a place that makes them feel calm, strong and safe. Talk about what that place looks, sounds and feels like, and invite them to draw a picture or write a description of it.

Bring the class back together to discuss in more depth the idea that just as Bunji's strength comes from knowing where he belongs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have carried that same deep connection to Country across

thousands of generations – and that this connection is one of the oldest and most remarkable parts of Australia's story.

As a class, share the [AIATSIS Map of Indigenous Australia](#) (or another trusted source) to find out whose Country your school is on. Look at the map together, find where your school is, and find the name of the Traditional Owners of your area.

Write the name on the board and say it together as a class. Using a small sticky note, place a marker on the map to show your school's location. Around the map, help students add drawings, words or symbols that show what they've learned about this Country, such as animals, special places, or words like 'respect', 'care' or 'story'. Ask students to think about their connection to this Country:

- 'Wylla fluffed her feathers as Bunji sat beside her. 'Bunji, I came to you from your Dreaming to teach you to connect with yourself and to lean on your support when you are feeling down.'

According to [Common Ground](#), 'The Dreaming [is] passed from generation to generation through storytelling, [it] shares beliefs that are connected to Country and the natural world. These stories incorporate creation, rules for living, social regulations, ethics and morality.'

Ask students if their family has a special story, explaining that the story could be how their parents met, or where their grandparents came from, or something their family always does together to celebrate an important event. Take a few brief responses and then explain that just as family stories explain something about who we are and where we belong, the Dreaming explains who Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are and where they belong.

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HaSS): GEOGRAPHY

- Show students a map of Australia and find the Northern Territory's Top End, where Bunji lives. Point out the two real places Wylla takes Bunji – Leliyn (the waterfall) and Nitmiluk Gorge. Compare the Top End landscape and animals from the book – red dirt, riverbanks with water lilies, monsoon trees and green tree frogs – to your own local area, then ask students to draw or write about one thing they noticed about Bunji's Country and how it felt different or similar to their own.

THE ARTS: VISUAL ART

- Invite students to create their own 'true colours' artwork inspired by Wylla the rainbow lorikeet and the vivid landscape of the Top End using the materials you have available, such as coloured pencils, pastels, or paint. Before they start, take a slow look through the illustrations together and notice how the artist Samantha Campbell uses bright swirling colours, circles and flowing shapes to show feelings and movement, asking students what colours and shapes make them feel calm, brave, or

happy. Students then create a self-portrait or a picture of themselves doing something brave, filling their artwork with colours that represent how bravery feels to them personally – just as Wylla's rainbow feathers showed the world who she truly was.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jake Gablonski is a Wiradjuri man and media personality who grew up in Katherine in the Northern Territory. He is a storyteller at heart with a personal passion for mental health, wellbeing, education and strengths-based community care. Jake often shares his voice as someone who belongs to both the First Nations and Rainbow communities, including those who sit at the intersection of both. His storytelling is shaped by lived experience, culture and a deep care for the power of feeling visible, strong and truly empowered.
www.jakegablonski.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Samantha Campbell is a contemporary artist and award-winning illustrator. She is descended from the Dagoman people and lives in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) with her family. She draws on inspiration from her childhood experiences living in remote Aboriginal communities, and finds enjoyment illustrating nature and people in a variety of mediums.
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