My Girragundji Lessons Ideas

**Synopsis**

*My Girragundji* is a retelling of the childhood memories of Boori Monty Pryor. It is about how, as a young boy, he manages to overcome his fears of the Hairyman and of the bullies at school. The narrator does this with the help of girragundji, the little green tree frog.

**Pre-Reading Activities**

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| Focus | Learning Activity |
| Book Cover  Illustrations  Predicting | Show students the front cover of *My Girragundji.*  **Questions**   * What could the book be about? * What language could the word girragundji be part of? * What might girragundji mean? * What could the title mean? * What other clues on the cover enable you to come to these conclusions?   Read the statement at the bottom of the front cover.  Have students consider the artwork of the frog. |
| Back Cover  Blurbs | Read the back cover to students.  **Questions**   * What could ‘growing up between two worlds’ mean? * What fears does the boy need courage to face? * Discuss daytime and night time fears. * What fears do students themselves face? You will need to be sensitive and to value any contribution to the discussion students may make. Encourage students to listen and to accept what their peers might say. |
| Fears  Growing Up | Have students work in small groups.  Provide each group with a large sheet of paper and felt tip pens. One student in each group can act as scribe.  Students should divide their page into three sections, titled *When* *I was younger*, *Now* and *When I’m an adult*.  Ask students to think of fears they may have experienced as a young child, fears they have now and fears they consider they may have as an adult.  Talk about fears in the night as well as in the day.  Display the work in the classroom so that students can read the work of other groups and realise the variety of fears that people face. |
| The Hairyman  Fears  Inferring | Reread the section on the back of the book that talks about the Hairyman.  Discuss the type of character he could be. What would he look like?As a class brainstorm some more words that could describe a Hairyman.  Have students work in small groups. Provide each group with a range of craft materials, scissors, glue, tape and paint. Craft materials could include wool, tin foil, paper plates, boxes, corrugated cardboard, or any other interesting junk materials. Ask each group to make their own Hairyman, making him as scary as possible.  When students have finished, have each group show their Hairyman to the class. Encourage students to talk about what makes it scary and why they chose particular craft materials, colours and shapes.  Read the back of the book again and ask students if they think they will see a picture of the Hairyman in the book. Why or why not? |
| Authors  Aboriginal People  Aboriginal Authors | At the end of the book there are two pages titled ‘About the authors’. Read these to students.  Boori Pryor is an author and a musician.  Ask students to name and talk about other Aboriginal people who have made significant progress in their chosen fields.  Display a variety of books by Aboriginal authors. Take care to only include books where the culture of the Aboriginal people has been respected. |

**Reading (Pages 9 – 22)**

*The narrator is a young Aboriginal boy and incorporates words from Aboriginal English in his narration. The narrator explains the effect the Hairyman is having on the household and describes his personal fear of the spirit. He tells of his fond feelings for Sharon, and of his difficulties with some of the kids at school. We begin to learn a little about the narrator’s family and of his life at home.*

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| Focus | Learning Activities |
| Comprehension  Text Analysis | **Questions**   * What do you notice about the language of the author? Think about the length of the sentences and his choice of words. * Have you ever been so scared that you couldn’t even call out? What happened? (Respect students’ rights to not share this information.) * What effect do the photographs have? * Think about a time when someone at school made life really tough for you. If you feel like sharing this, tell us what happened. * Who is the narrator referring to when he talks about ‘our people’ and ‘us mob’? |
| Aboriginal English | Talk with students about the significance of Aboriginal English in Australia. Aboriginal English is a dialect of English and it incorporates words from Australian Aboriginal languages. Much of the language is spoken and until recently was not recorded in the written form. The written form therefore contains a variety of spellings. The English K-6 documents have some interesting notes and explanations dealing with this.  On chart paper make a list of words from the text that are Aboriginal English.  Play a game with students called ‘I’m thinking of a word that means... ’. Students can also play this game in small groups. |
| Aboriginal English | Provide each student with the attached BLM 1.  Ask students to write a glossary of Aboriginal English words from the text. Remind them to include a short definition or translation of each word and to place the words in alphabetical order.  Most of the words are defined by the narrator. Encourage students to guess the meanings of words from their context if they are not defined. |
| Similes | The text contains some interesting examples of similes.  Explain to students that a simile likens one thing to another that is quite different. The use of ‘as’ or ‘like’ prepares the reader for this comparison.  Have students think of examples from everyday life. (I’m hot as toast; she’s silly as a monkey; we were busy as bees; they were cool like cucumbers.)  Distribute attached BLM 2.  As you read aloud the pages listed, have students identify and record the similes. Discuss the vivid picture that they portray.  Have students try to come up with their own, different similes for the same images. |

**Reading (Page 23 – 41)**

*In the midst of a terrifying visit from the Hairyman, the narrator finds that a green tree frog, girragundji, has landed on him. The two develop a relationship and Gundji gives the narrator the courage he needs to deal with school, football and life at home. The narrator believes that the old people have sent girragundji to protect him.*

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| Focus | Learning Activity |
| Comprehension  Text Analysis | **Questions**   * What effect does the change of font and different-sized writing have on the way you read pages 24 to 29? * What do you notice about the length of the sentences? * Have you ever felt a frog? What did it feel like? * Imagine having a frog land on you in the middle of the night. How do you think you would react? * Who does the narrator believe sent girragundji to watch over him? * How has girragundji changed the narrator’s life? |
| Adjectives  Descriptions | Have students think about how the narrator describes the features of girragundji. Ask for some examples and talk about the adjectives that the narrator uses. Explain to students that an adjective is a describing word.  On attached BLM 3, have students draw a picture of girragundji. Encourage students to use lots of details and to use the illustrations and photographs from the book to help  them.  Ask students to write a description on the lower section of the BLM. They may need to continue on the reverse of the page. The description should begin with a general introductory statement and be followed by a series of statements about the different characteristics and qualities of girragundji.  Encourage students to use lots of adjectives, and to use their thesaurus to find words with a similar meaning. |
| Acrostic Poems | Explain to students how an acrostic poem is written. Explain that each letter in a chosen word is used to begin a line in the poem, with each line relating in some way to the word.  Show students how **RIBIT** stands for **R**eal and/**I**mportant to me;/ **B**ullfrog it is not—/**I**t’s my own beautiful/**T**ree frog.  Have students work in small groups to write an acrostic poem for girragundji. You will need to specify if you want students to write statements for each letter or individual words.  Encourage students to use their descriptions from their work on attached BLM 3. |
| Communication  Conversation  Telephone Ettiquette | The narrator takes good care of girragundji.  Have students in pairs read pages 33, 34, 39 and 40 again. Ask students to imagine that the narrator is going away for a night. He has telephoned them to ask if they would mind girragundji while he is away.  Provide students with two old telephones, or equipment representing telephones. Have one student take on the role of the narrator, and then conduct an imaginary conversation with another student in the class who will be looking after Gundji.  Remind students of telephone etiquette.  Have students sit back to back, or separated in some way so that students cannot see each other. On attached BLM 4have each student record their telephone conversation. |

**Reading (Pages 42 – 63)**

*As the narrator’s father teaches him how to kill for food, the narrator draws on the strength of girragundji. Back home everyone is scared of the Hairyman and it is decided that he be smoked out of the house. When the Hairyman visits the narrator he overcomes his fears. The narrator is now also brave enough to speak with Sharon.*

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| Focus | Learning Activity |
| Comprehension  Text Analysis | **Questions**   * Are you sometimes scared to go the toilet in the middle of the night? * Think about the route you take to get to the toilet? Is it similar to the narrator’s route? * Does your family have a special place to visit, like the Bohle is for the narrator? What makes it special for you? * The narrator takes some important steps on his way to becoming an adult in this section of the book. What are they? * Popeye the grandad is asked to smoke the Hairyman from the house. Why? * When Popeye’s generation has died, who will perform these culturally significant tasks? |
| Significant Places  Inferences  Mapping | Ask students to think about the significant places that are mentioned in the text. Make a list of these. The list could include the narrator’s house, the hibiscus tree, the dunny, the Bohle, Sharon’s house and the footy field.  Can students make inferences as to where they are in relation to each other?  Provide students with attached BLM 5 and ask students to draw a map of the narrator’s local area. Have students use the text where applicable, but encourage them to use their imagination as well. Have students include a title, a scale and a direction arrow. |
| Dreams  Diary | Discuss with students the dreams of the narrator.  Have students think about their own dreams.  For one week have students keep a Dream Diary using attached BLM 6. Each morning they should write about the dreams they can remember from the night before. Students may only be able to remember parts of their dreams. Encourage them to write about these too. |
| Characters | Play a game of ‘Who’s Who?’ with students.  Write the name of each character from the book onto a piece of card. Students take turns to sit in a ‘hotseat’. Once in the hotseat they put on a hat. You may prefer to use a thin strip of cardboard coiled and glued into a cylinder so it sits on their head.  Have students in the hotseat close their eyes and choose one of the cards. Attach it to their hat with a paper clip. They must guess the name of the character by asking questions that require a yes or no answer.  Use attached BLM 7as a follow up activity. |
| Abbreviated Words  Aboriginal English  Contractions | Much of the text contains words which have been abbreviated.  Ask students why abbreviated words might be used.  Discuss the differences between spoken and written text, and the significance of Aboriginal English in this book.  Show students attached BLM 8. Explain to students that they must cut, paste and add an apostrophe to make the abbreviated forms of the words shown. Use ‘wouldn’t’ and ‘he’s’ as examples since these are not used on the BLM.  Alternatively you may prefer to use the BLM as part of a game.  Students play in pairs. Photocopy and glue the word sections onto card and cut them out. Have students place the cards face down in front of them.  This game is similar to what some students may know as ‘Memory’. Students take turns to turn two of the cards over. If they can be combined to form an abbreviated word the student keeps them and has another turn. If they can’t then the words are returned face down on the playing area. The game continues until all of the abbreviated words have been formed. The winner is the one with the most words. |

**Reading (Pages 64 – 74)**

*Disaster strikes as girragundji is taken by a snake. Although the narrator is very sad, he is now a stronger and more confident person. He recognises that what he has gained from his friendship with, and the spirit of, girragundji, will remain with him forever.*

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| Focus | Learning Activities |
| Comprehension  Text Analysis | **Questions**   * Read to the bottom of page 65. What do you think is going to happen? * Now read pages 66–70. Have you ever been as sad as the narrator must have been? * Think for a minute about what it would feel like if your pet died suddenly? * Discuss the feelings that are involved when a friend moves to a new school or a kind neighbour moves away. * How does the narrator know that girragundji is still there protecting him, even after she has died? * In the narrator’s life, how significant has his friendship with girragundji been? |
| Time lines  Significant Events  Text Recall | Ask students to recall some of the significant events in the book. Write these on chart paper as students volunteer answers. Discuss with students the order in which these events occurred.  Have students complete attached BLM 9. Students may need to refer back to the text to check the order of events.  On each blank line students record a significant event that follows the previous event, but occurs before the next event listed. |
| Time lines | You may need to demonstrate how to map significant events by doing your own ‘life events’, before students attempt to do their own.  Have students think about significant events that have made an impact on their own life. You may want to introduce this lesson on one day, encourage students to talk with their parents or carers that evening, then record on the following day.  Students can think about when they first learnt to smile or to speak, their first day at school, the various teachers they have had, when they learnt to swim, or when they have been sick.  Students will need to think about each event and consider to what extent it had a positive or negative impact on their life.  Ask students to record the event and its impact on attached BLM 10. You may need to help students write the years along the lower axis. They may prefer to use the year, or their ages—0,1,2,3. |

**Beyond the Book**

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| Focus | Learning Activities |
| Respecting Cultures  Celebrations | In the acknowledgments pages people are thanked for treating the story with care. Ask students why the story might need to be treated with care.  Talk with students about times in their lives when they have been asked to respect a culture or religion that has been different to their own. Encourage students to talk about entering churches, visiting Uluru or being part of celebrations.  Depending on the time of year that you are doing the unit, choose a celebration from a culture which is not significantly represented in your class, and complete some activities based around this occasion.  Find out when the Chinese New Year starts and which animal is associated with the coming year. Wish others ‘Kung hay fat Choi’ which is the New Year greeting and means ‘Wishing you to prosper.’  Have students select items from a menu and arrange to have Chinese takeaway delivered to your classroom. Chinese children are given red packets of ‘lucky money’ to mark Chinese New Year. Have students design and make their own using red paper and gold felt-tip pens or pencils.  Divali is celebrated in October or November. The date depends on the lunar calendar. Read the story of *Rama and Sita* (by Govinder Ram) to students. Talk about how the Festival of Lights in India is called Divali and people light divas (lights) to celebrate the safety of Rama and Sita. Make some divas. Use clay to make pinch pots. Add a piece of crumpled yellow cellophane for the flame. |
| Information Report  Frogs | Take students to the school library. Help students locate books about frogs. Use the index and the contents pages to find specific sections about Australian frogs.  Have each student or groups of students research one type of Australian frog.  Write the following headings onto chart paper and have students organise  their information using these headings.  Name of frog:  General classification:  Appearance:  Movement:  Habitat:  Food:  Life cycle:  Other interesting facts:  Encourage students to write an information report based on their research. You may need to revise the structure of an information report with students first—general opening statement, description and a concluding statement.  Each section of information should form a new paragraph. Students should include a picture and may also choose to include a glossary. |
| Children’s Book Council of Australia  Book Review | Each year The Children’s Book Council of Australia (CBCA) present the Children’s Book of the Year Awards. In 1999 *My Girragundji* was short-listed for the award of ‘Book of the Year: Younger Readers’.  Talk with students about the criteria for the award. The CBCA states that ‘Literary merit is the primary consideration. Child appeal, design, production and quality of printing, and quality of illustration are also taken into account.’ (*Short List Information Book 1999,* CBCA).  Ask students to pretend that in 1999 they were invited to join the judging panel. Have them reread *My* *Girragundji* from the point of view of a judge. Ask students to write a review of the book, stating their reasons for or against *My Girragundji* receiving the award. |
| Science  Inventions | Talk about the difficulties involved in having a constant supply of mosquitoes available (for feeding girragundji).  Provide students with grid paper and have them design and make a possible mosquito catcher.  Provide the class with as huge an array of craft materials as you can. Include lots of boxes and containers from the recycling container. Let students make their own mosquito catcher. |
| Science  Frogs  Tadpoles | Raise frogs from tadpoles.  Check with your local council that you are able to remove frog spawn from ponds.  As the eggs hatch, feed the tadpoles fish food and boiled lettuce.  Release most of the froglets back into the pond as they tend to start eating each other if there are too many. Keep just a few froglets and watch them become frogs. Return the frogs to the pond when they have stopped growing. |
| Aboriginal History | Research the Aboriginal history of your local area. Contact the council and the library for information. Invite a guest speaker along if possible. |
| The Quinkins | Research the Quinkins.  Read *Quinkin Mountain* and *The Quinkins.*  Where in Australia do they come from? What do their ancestors look like? |
| Photography  Shadow  Fear | Look at the photographs in the book. How does the photographer create a scary mood?  Plan and take some scary photos.  Use shadows and other techniques from the book.  Display your photos and invite other classes to come and see them. |
| Music  Dance | Have students work in small groups.  Ask them to choose a section of the text which lends itself to musical accompaniment.  Students must think about the mood they wish to create. They can choose to use well-known pieces of music or make up their own percussion.  Repeat the previous activity using dance to portray a section of the text. |
| Sculpture  Frogs | Have students use modelling clay to make girragundji.  They can use the illustrations in the book to check the proportion and detail of her body parts. |
| Patterns  Aboriginal Art | Look at artwork done by Aboriginal artists such as Bronwyn Bancroft, Elaine Russell and Jim Pike.  Look at the designs and patterns they use in their paintings.  Compare them to the designs on girragundji. |
| Bullying  Confidence  Trust | Talk with students about people they can turn to if they are having bullying problems at school.  Play some confidence building or trust games. Depending on the existing level of ‘trust’ in your classroom you may prefer to play a variation of the following game.  Have the class sit in a circle. Blindfold one student with an airline blindfold or a scarf. Arrange some ‘explodable’ objects (books, paddle-pop sticks, beanbags) in the middle of the circle. Choose one student to direct the blindfolded student across the circle to a specified position, without letting them stand on the ‘explodable’ objects. Instructions need to be specific, for example ‘take two small steps to your right’ or ‘take a tiny step backwards.’ |
| Aboriginal Language  Communities | Expressions are used in *‘My Girragundji’*, that many people may not understand, eg.  Migaloo........white person  Quinkin........ spirit  Gulmra......... toilet  Jalbu............. woman or young girl  Yibulla.......... you follow  Girragundji... green tree frog  Wirrell........... shell fish (for eating)  Discuss how language and the way people use language varies across cultures and communities.  Working in small groups, have students imagine if a visitor from far away were to come into their community. Have groups create clear explanations of words and expressions that they feel may be unique to their community or generation. Some examples of expressions that may warrant listing and explanation may include; tellie, barbie, sweet, epic, fail, cool, catch ya later, fully sick, etc.  Arrange expressions in alphabetical order and compile a mini dictionary. |
| Aboriginal People  Research | Have students choose areas of interest to research further using the school library, media sources and trusted internet websites, eg. Aboriginal history, culture, beliefs, folklore, the Dreaming, land rights, art, stolen generation, national apology, discrimination.  Students may wish to look Aboriginal history in their school area, or to compare Aboriginal history and culture with other people’s histories and cultures. |
| Oral History  Story Telling | The telling of stories is a vital element of Aboriginal culture.  Discuss with students the skills involved in the telling of a story. What qualities maintain or heighten a listener’s interest? List these, eg. eye-contact, facial expression, gesture, pause, variation in rhythm, stress, pitch, pace, volume, etc. What qualities might lose a listener’s interest? eg. shuffling around, mumbling, fidgeting, speaking in a monotone, speaking too slowly/quickly, etc.  Working in small groups, tell simple stories to one another bearing the preceding discussion in mind. These may be true or fabricated.  Ask students to retell their stories, but once in a comic way, and then in a serious way. Observe how the same story can shift from comic to serious (or vice versa) according to how it is told.  In small groups ask students to devise and tell a story together, using action to enhance it in any ways they can. |
| Discussion  Issues within Book | Discuss the below questions and statements.   * What do Meme McDonald’s photographs add to the reading of *‘My Girragundji’*? * How the book might transform into a live show. * In *‘My Girragundji’* the boy overcomes his fears. Identify and then compare what children and adults are most afraid of. How can fear be overcome? * In *‘My Girragundji’* we see the boy grow up. In what way/s? What makes people grow up? * Superstition is part of the boy’s everyday life. Identify similarities and differences between superstitions of different cultures. Where do superstitions come from? * In *‘My Girragundji’* we see different systems of belief, eg. that the Hairyman can kill you, that a person can get warts from touching frogs, that mud is dirty, etc. Where do these notions come from? Compare beliefs of different cultures Why might differences and similarities exist? * The boy has a great deal of respect for his elders? What does he learn from them? Can older people learn from the young? What? * The boy’s father teaches him never to kill unless for food. Some cultures hunt for sport. Is that acceptable? Why? Why not? * Identify similarities and differences between the day to day life of the boy in *‘My Girragundji’* and that of children of other cultures and backgrounds. * *‘My Girragundji’* centres around a boy’s connection with a frog and with nature. What is special about relationships people have with animals and with nature? * Aboriginal Australians did not have the right to vote until 1967. Why not? What is discrimination? Identify where/when it occurs in Australia and elsewhere. * What is Reconciliation? Are younger generations responsible for their parents actions? What steps should be taken to right past wrongs? * How are Aboriginal people depicted in the media and in white folklore? How has the representation of Aboriginal people changed over time? * Boori Pryor (the author of *‘My Girragundji’)* says ‘Look at white people’s story books. Everything good is white, like princesses, brides and angels. Everything evil is black, like witches and death’ (*‘Maybe Tomorrow’*, 1998). What is he suggesting about the way people come to view the world? * Where possible, interview elderly people of different backgrounds. Find out about their lives, beliefs and personal memories. Identify how peoples’ experiences differ, and also what they have in common. |
| Aboriginal Culture  Totems  Spiritual Connections | In My Girragundji, the boy feels a strong connection to the frog. In Aboriginal culture, people have strong spiritual connections to the land and nature. The symbolism and meaning of specific animals and/or elements can vary from individual to individual, clan to clan.  Have each student choose an animal or element and design and create a totem in sculpture, mask or other form.  A totem is normally a symbol of the natural or supernatural that is treated with reverence and often used in rituals. Display these. |
| Costume Design | Have students design costumes, sets for My Girragundji. |
| Locations  Characters | Have students list locations and characters that feature in the story.  Groups sketch or make models of designs and present these to one another. |
| Point of View  Monologues | The story of My Girragundji is told through the eyes of the young boy.  Have students choose another character in the boy’s life and retell an episode of the story from their point of view. Characters that students may select could include one of the boy’s relatives, one of the boy’s teachers, schoolmates, a bully, Sharon, the frog (Gundji), crocodile, snake, etc.  In doing this task, encourage students to consider a setting and point in time for their character to deliver their monologue. They should also consider how to convey their characters’ age, disposition, physical condition. How should the monologue start/end? How would the character speak? eg. accent, speech patterns, language. Students may incorporate costume and/or props.  View monologues. Share responses. |
| Animal Movements  Drama | Ask students to use their bodies and travel across the room and try to represent a chosen or allocated animal. Watch one another and see if class members can guess the animals being depicted.  Sounds can also be incorporated.  Identify performance qualities required to indicate size, weight, strength, disposition, etc.  Have students perform simple scenes as their animal characters, eg. hunting, eating, playing with a ball, running away from a predator, fighting, etc.  Discuss performance qualities that made these characters and activities easily  identifiable. |
| Drama  Tableux | Organise students into groups of 4 - 6.  Each group is to create 4 interrelated tableaux (frozen poses) representing a chosen or allocated part of the story of My Girragundji.  Each tableaux must involve the entire group.  Using a tambourine, beat a slow regular rhythm and ask students to be in each of  their 4 tableaux positions by count 8 of every 8 beats. ie using counts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 to move into the next tableaux.  Give groups some time to consider and rework how they might move between tableaux (on counts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7) for maximum dramatic effect. Using music may also be an option.  The sequence is set out below;  Counts 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Count 8  1st bar of 8 Move into Tableaux #1 Tableaux #1  2nd bar of 8 Move from Tableaux #1 To Tableaux #2 Tableaux #2  3rd bar of 8 Move from Tableaux #2 To Tableaux #3 Tableaux #3  4th bar of 8 Move from Tableaux #3 To Tableaux #4 Tableaux #4  Perform sequences for one another. |
| Music  Dance | Divide the class into two groups; musicians and dancers.  Musicians form a circle around dancers and use voice and percussion instruments to improvise sounds.  Starting from stillness, the dancer group improvise movement to the sounds they hear. Encourage the musicians to incorporate changes in volume, pace, pause, pitch.  Reverse this. Have the movement group start in stillness and silence and begin to move their bodies. The musicians are to improvise accompaniment in response to the movement they see.  Style of motion and sound for this activity may be suggested in advance, eg. representing or inspired by native animals, elements, spirits, etc. |
| Themes  Morals | Discuss with students what My Girragundji might have communicated to them, eg. did it convey messages in regard to growing up, respect, responsibility, fear/courage, etc. In what way/s were these values communicated?  Working in small groups, Have students choose a message to convey, eg. perhaps around themes concerning intercultural understanding, human rights, respect, discrimination, superstition.  Have groups create and perform dramatised pieces with the aim of conveying chosen message/s. Share these works with other students.  Discuss responses. Were the intended messages conveyed through the performances? If so, identify how. |