



LT7 ■ My Girragundji
Middle Primary

Blake's Topic Bank

My Girragundji

by Meme McDonald
& Boori Pryor

by Kara Louise Munn



Each literature unit contains:

- 8 pages of teaching notes
- Activities to take students into the book, through the book and beyond the book
- Discussion questions
- 10 practical blackline masters
- National Profile outcomes

Introduction

Synopsis

My Girragundji is a retelling of the childhood memories of one of the authors. 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.

Reading Level

Independent reading 10 years and up; read aloud 9 to 10 years.

Overview of Unit

The aim of this unit is to encourage students to hypothesise, empathise and evaluate while they are reading. Many of the activities require students to reread sections of the text or to search for details. Activities provide students with opportunities to explore Aboriginal English, similes and metaphors, adjectives, maps and abbreviations. Students will reflect on their own life by keeping a Dream Diary and mapping significant events from their life. During this unit students will be guided in their reading of a complex text that deals with mature themes.

Major Themes

Spirit and protection, fear, family relationships, friendship, love.

Literary Techniques

First person narration using some Aboriginal English.



Grammar Focus

Use of adjectives, abbreviated words, similes.

Useful Resources

Multiple copies of *My Girragundji*.

Meme McDonald and Boori Pryor, *The Binna Binna Man*.

Percy Trezise, *Quinkin Mountain*.

Percy Trezise and Dick Roughsey, *The Quinkins*.

Local council information regarding history of Aboriginal people in the surrounding area.

Sections of State, Territory or National English K–6 documents dealing with Aboriginal English.

Willett, Cox and Smith, *Short List Information Book* 1999, The Children's Book Council of Australia.

Assessment

Students will:

Speaking and Listening

3.4 Reflect on own approach to communication and the ways in which others interact.

- Compare the features of Aboriginal English with those of English.
- Recognise that Aboriginal English is a language of Australia.
- Construct a telephone conversation.
- Use and make abbreviated words.

Reading and Viewing

3.5 Interpret and discuss relationships between ideas, information and events.

- Construct a map of places mentioned in the text.
- Discuss characters.
- Recognise the order of events in the text.

Writing

3.10 Recognise that certain text types and features are associated with particular purposes and audiences.

- Write a glossary, a description, and a dream diary.
- Recognise and write similes.

Into the Book



1 The Cover

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.

Now turn the book over and 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 nighttime 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.

Have students work in small groups. Provide each group with a large sheet of paper and felt tip pens. 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. One student in each group can act as scribe. 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.



2 The Hairyman

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?

3 About the 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. Show Aboriginal artwork if it has been approved by the Aboriginal people.

Reading the Book



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 Hairymen 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.

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'?

Session 1

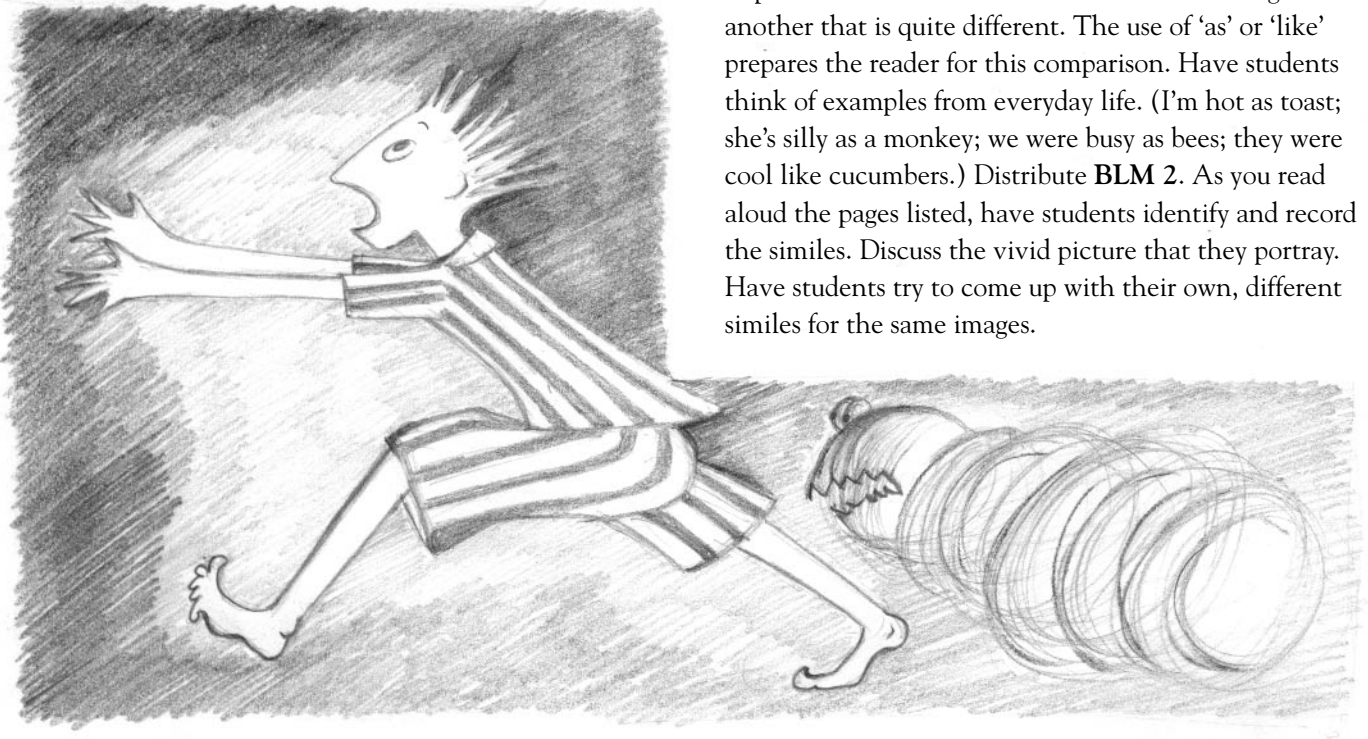
Talk with students about the significance of Aboriginal English in Australia. Aboriginal English is a dialect of English and it incorporates words from Australian Aboriginal languages. Much of the language is spoken and until recently was not recorded in the written form. The written form therefore contains 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.

Session 2

Provide each student with **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.

Session 3

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 **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.





Pages 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.

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?

Session 4

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 **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.

Session 5

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 **Real** and **/Important to me; / Bullfrog it is not—/It's my own beautiful/Tree 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 **BLM 3**.

Session 6

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 **BLM 4** have each student record their telephone conversation.





Pages 42–63

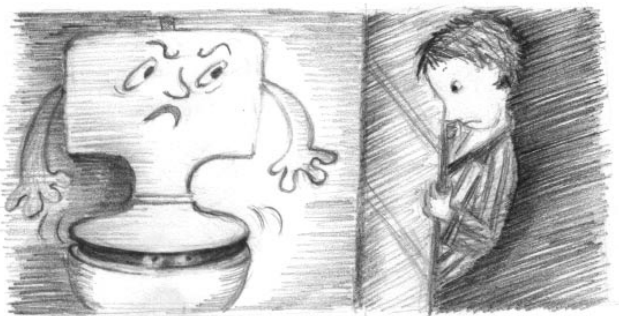
As the narrator's father teaches him how to kill for food, the narrator draws on the strength of girragundji. Back home everyone is scared of the Hairyman and it is decided that he be smoked out of the house. When the Hairyman visits the narrator he overcomes his fears. The narrator is now also brave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

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?

Session 7

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 **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.



Session 8

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 **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.

Session 9

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 **BLM 7** as a follow up activity.

Session 10

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 **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.



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.

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?

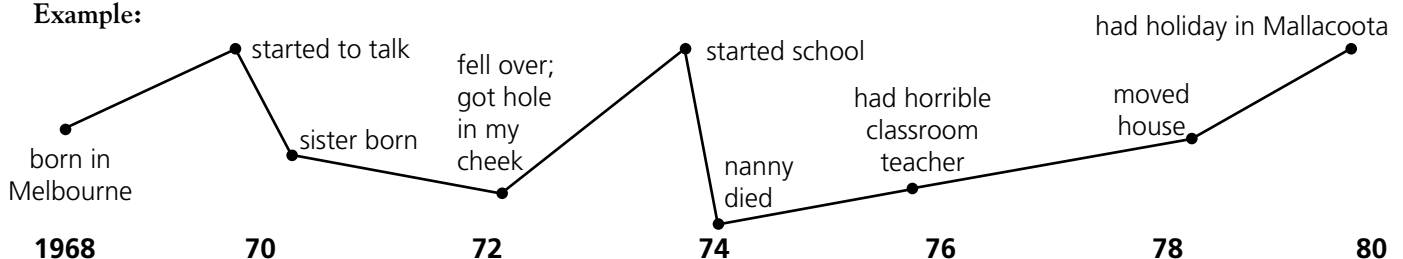
Session 11

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 **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.

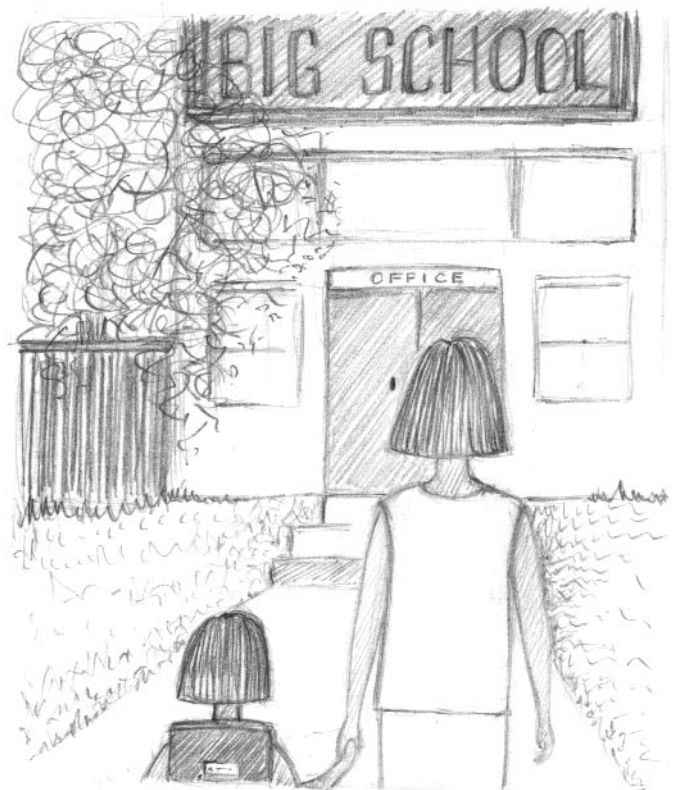
Session 12

You may need to demonstrate how to map significant events by doing your own 'life events', before students attempt to do their own.

Example:



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 **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



1 Respecting Cultures

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.

2 Library visit

Take students to the school or local 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.

3 The Short List

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.



Integrated Activities



1 Science

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.

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.

2 Society and Environment

Research the Aboriginal history of your local area. Contact the council and the library for information. Invite a guest speaker along if possible.

Research the Quinkins. Read *Quinkin Mountain* and *The Quinkins*. Where in Australia do they come from? What do their ancestors look like?

3 The Arts

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.

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.

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.

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.

4 PD and Health

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.'



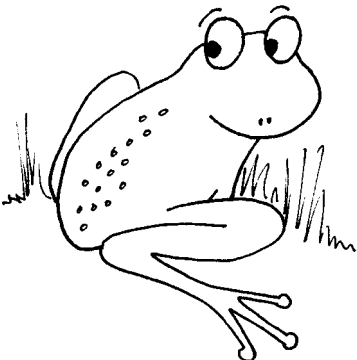
Name _____ Date _____

BLM 1

Aboriginal English is a dialect of English. Aboriginal English incorporates words from Australian Aboriginal languages.

Write a glossary of Aboriginal English words used in the text. For each Aboriginal English word write the English meaning. The narrator sometimes tells us what the word means. If not, use the context of the word to work out its meaning. Don't forget to put the words in alphabetical order.

Glossary

Aboriginal English word	Your definition
	

Name _____ Date _____

BLM 2

Listen as your teacher reads aloud the pages listed. Write down the simile as you hear it. Think about the image the author is trying to portray. Try to write your own similes for the same images.

p. 12 _____

p. 14 _____

p. 16 _____

p. 18 _____

p. 19 _____

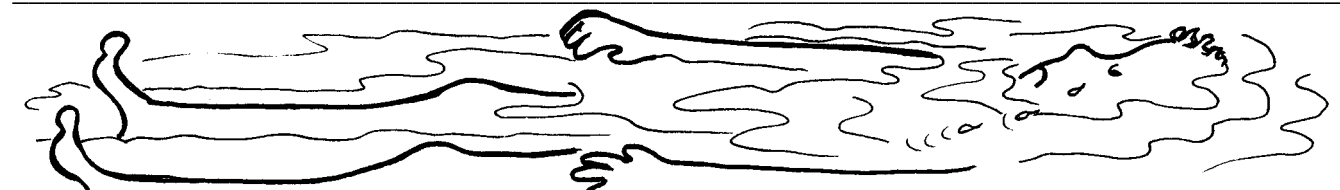
p. 20 _____

Write down the similes you find when you read the following pages. Again, create your own similes for these images.

p. 62 _____

p. 65 _____

p. 70 _____



Write a description of girragundji. The description should begin with a introduction and follow with a series of statements about the different characteristics and qualities of girragundji.

[illegible]

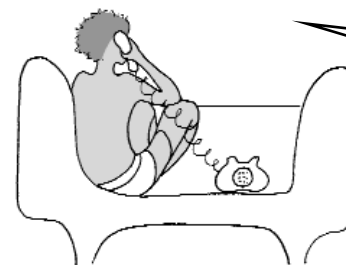
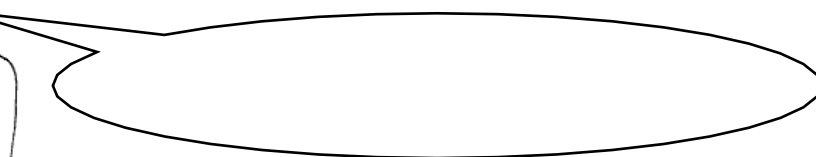
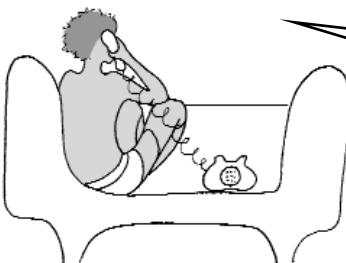
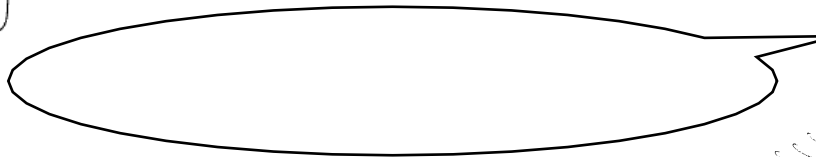
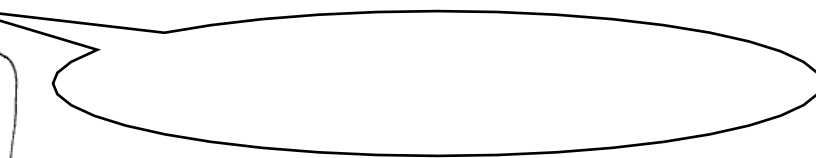
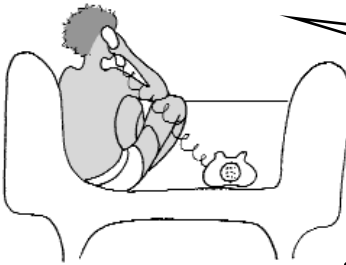
Name _____ Date _____

BLM 4

Minding girragundji

Pretend that the narrator has telephoned you. He is going away for one night and wants you to stay at his house and look after Gundji. What would he say to you on the phone?

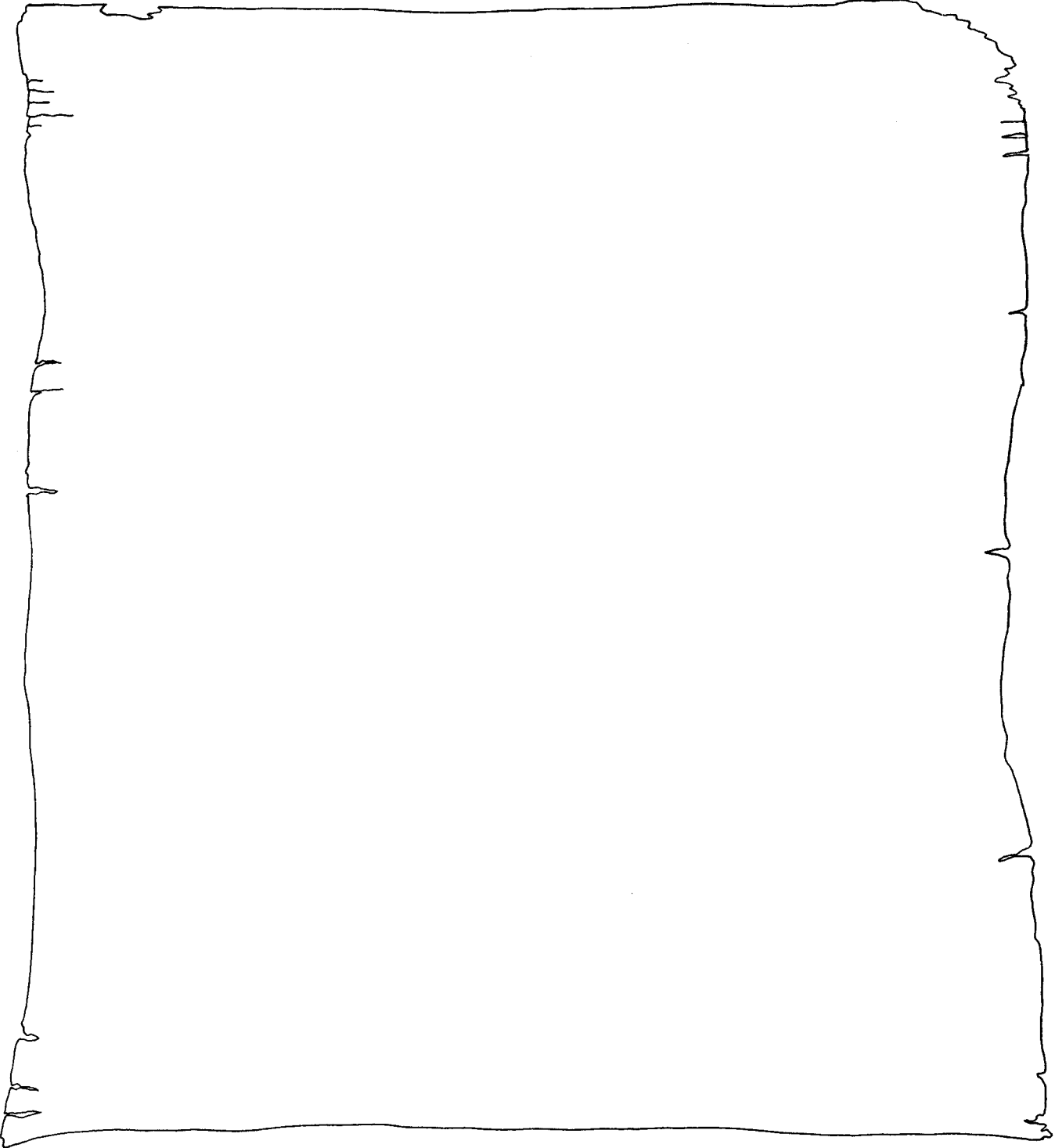
What questions would you need to ask? Write the conversation you might have in the speech bubbles below.



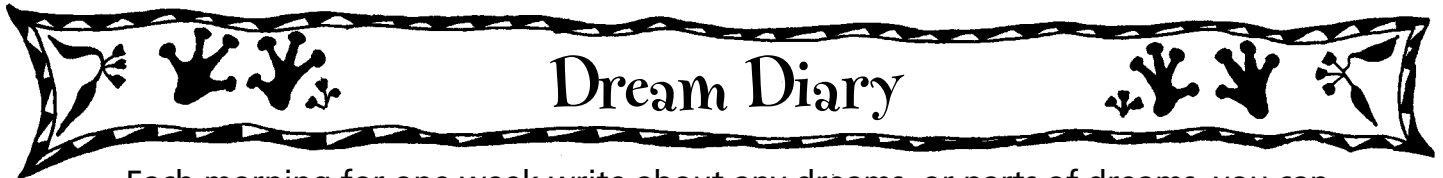
Name _____ Date _____

BLM 5

Make a list of the places that are significant for the narrator. Work out where they are in relation to each other. Make a guess at their position if the information is not provided for you. On the map outline below mark these places and include a direction arrow, a title and a scale.



Name _____ Date _____

BLM 6

Each morning for one week write about any dreams, or parts of dreams, you can remember from the night before.

Night 1 _____

Night 2 _____

Night 3 _____

Night 4 _____

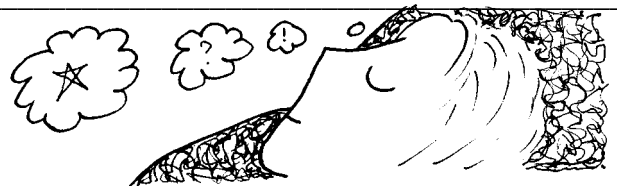
Night 5 _____

Night 6 _____

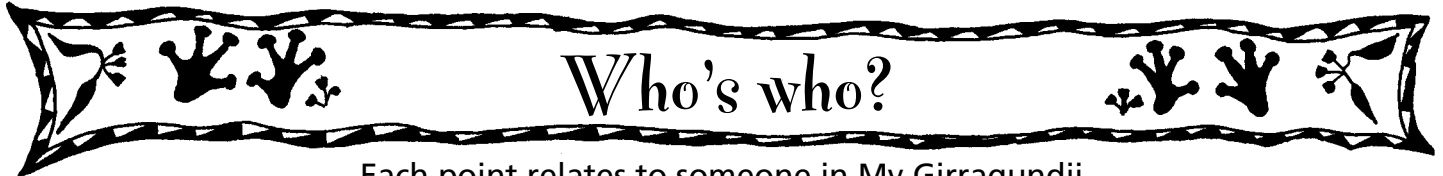
Night 7 _____

Put a star next to the best dream you had.

Put a cross next to the worst dream you had.



Name _____ Date _____

BLM 7

Each point relates to someone in My Girragundji.

See if you can name the character(s).

- ⇒ jumps into the narrator's bed because he's scared of the Hairyman

- ⇒ eats mosquitoes _____
- ⇒ learns to kill a turtle for food _____
- ⇒ packs the ute _____
- ⇒ knows the way of the old people _____
- ⇒ tells lots of stories _____
- ⇒ drags his feet on the lino _____
- ⇒ has her own bike _____
- ⇒ are too scared to sleep in the boys' room until the Hairyman has been smoked out

- ⇒ says bad people did bad things in the house a long time ago

- ⇒ saw the Hairyman in the boys' room _____

Now make up some more 'Who's who' points for your friends.

⇒ _____

_____ = _____

⇒ _____

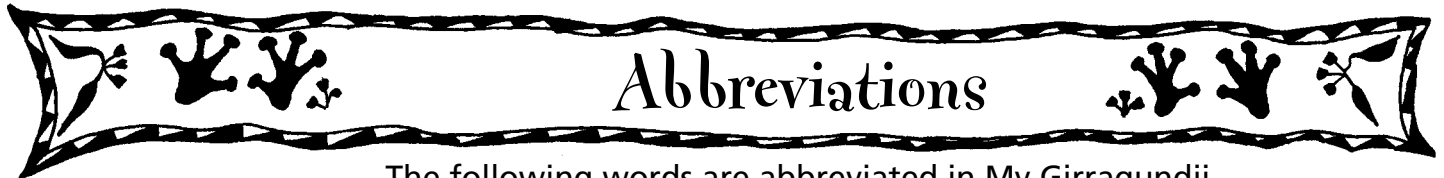
_____ = _____

⇒ _____

_____ = _____



Name _____

BLM 8

The following words are abbreviated in My Girragundji.

are not p. 42

is not p. 46

we will p. 56

it is p. 42

they have p. 47

I am p. 57

someone is p. 42

you have p. 47

she is p. 58

does not p. 43

there is p. 50

that is p. 61

they are p. 43

there will p. 53

I have p. 62

do not p. 44

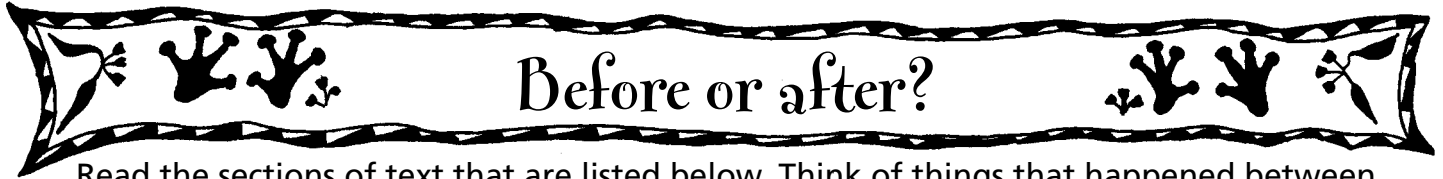
how is p. 54

good day p. 62

Cut out the word sections below. Make the abbreviated versions of the words in the list above by pasting them onto another piece of paper. You will need to add apostrophes in the correct places. Check your answers using the page references.

I	s	there	m
t	aren	ve	s
she	t	isn	that
ve	how	g	ll
s	it	don	s
doesn	I	re	ve
there	we	s	they
ll	t	t	someone
s	you	day	they

Name _____ Date _____

BLM 9

Read the sections of text that are listed below. Think of things that happened between these events and write them on the lines provided.

1. The narrator wets the bed and is afraid of the Hairyman.

2. _____

3. The narrator has a fight with Stacey Straun.

4. _____

5. The narrator no longer fakes a belly-ache before school.

6. _____

7. Mum starts to cut back the hibiscus tree.

8. _____

9. Cousin Kev is scared of the Hairyman.

10. _____

11. The narrator and his dad build a fire.

12. _____

13. The narrator manages to say g'day to Sharon.

14. _____

15. The narrator grows warts on his fingers.

16. _____

Name _____ Date _____



Plot the important events of your life.



**really
great**



**not so
great**

year/age