

# Ernie Dances to the Didgeridoo

By Alison Lester

*Ernie leaves all his friends and travels far away to Arnhem Land. This book describes his life with his new friends and the different lifestyles and landscapes he is experiencing, through letters to Nicky, Rosie, Frank, Tessa, Celeste and Clive. Sensitive, colourful and informative illustrations will expand children's knowledge about life with Aboriginal friends in Arnhem Land.*

## Literacy

### 1. Introducing the Book

The book is called *Ernie Dances to the Didgeridoo*. What else do you think Ernie might do? What is a didgeridoo? How is it made? Show pictures of didgeridoos and listen to a recording of one being played.

## Music

### Singing and Listening

Learn the song *Jabbin Jabbin* (MMADD about the Arts CD). Listen to the sound of the Didgeridoo in the introduction to the song on the CD.

### Pitch

Note the simple guitar chords above the music, ie. C and A minor (Am). These notes can be played as a drone (ie use the note C to the beat of the song in lines 1 and 3, and the note A to the beat in lines 2 and 4).

*Extension:* Have children play the full chords to provide a western accompaniment to the song, ie.

*Lines 1 and 3: Play the notes C, E, G simultaneously to the beat*

*Lines 2 and 4: Play the notes A, C, E simultaneously to the beat*



### **Dynamics**

Play and sing lines 1 and 3 loudly and lines 2 and 4 softly. Then sing and play lines 1 and 3 softly and the other lines loudly. Discuss which sounds more effective.

### **Structure**

Note that the first and third lines are the same, and the second and fourth lines are the same.

Divide the class into pairs, label one person in each pair 'A' and the other person 'B'.

Have 'A' make a movement during line 1, then freeze, while 'B' makes a contrasting movement during line 2.

Repeat for lines 3 and 4.

## Dance

### **Appreciation and Improvisation**

View videos of Aboriginal dancing and have children experiment with some of the movements seen in the video.

Have them create their own dance movements to *Jabbin Jabbin* (see above song), showing the same and different phrases by using one movement during lines 1 and 3 and a contrasting movement during lines 2 and 4.

Have some children clapping rhythm sticks to the beat and, if possible, a boy playing a didgeridoo. (Note, in many cases it is culturally inappropriate for girls or women to play the didgeridoo).

## Literacy

## 2. Coming Back to the Book

Using post it notes, cover the text on various pages, below the single illustrations.

Ask the children to guess what is happening in each illustration. The illustration can also be covered and the children read the text.

### Drama

#### Freeze Frames

In pairs, children choose one of the illustrations from the book and work out how to create a still picture with their bodies and simple props to portray what is happening in the illustration.

The rest of the class close their eyes then open them to view one depiction by one group for about ten seconds.

As the class close their eyes, the next group sets up their depiction and the class then views this one for about ten seconds.

Repeat this activity until every pair has presented their depiction of an illustration.

Children may either guess which illustration each freeze frame is portraying, or the teacher may like to organise the pairs into the order in which the pictures appear in the story.

### Music

#### Singing

Many communities in Arnhem Land live a long way from hospitals and health care. When children have to go to the Darwin Base Hospital, often their families cannot come and visit them because of the distances involved.

The song *Sikbala* (*The Sing! Book*, 2001, ABC) was written after the composer saw many of the children from Arnhem Land who were all alone at the hospital. Listen to the song and discuss how easy or difficult it is for our families to visit us if we have to go to hospital.



#### Structure

Using rhythm sticks, chopsticks or pens/pencils, tap them together while the verse is sung and tap them on the desk or floor during the chorus.

### Duration (Beat and Rhythm)

Have one group tap the beat and the other group tap the rhythm during the verse. In the chorus, swap around.

## Visual Arts

Research different sorts of Aboriginal artworks within the context of their spirituality and legends as well as the techniques and media used.

If at all possible have someone from the Aboriginal community to talk to the children about this and to demonstrate different kinds of artwork.

If this is not possible, the teacher should talk with the Aboriginal people about what learning experiences would be appropriate and culturally sensitive within that particular community for the children to be involved in.

If appropriate, after relevant research and / or demonstration, boys could design, make and decorate their own didgeridoos and the whole class could decorate cut pieces of 2.5cm dowel to use as clap sticks to accompany their singing.

As stimulus and examples, use the pictures from the text as well as other reference books and information from the internet. Use these didgeridoos when revisiting the above music and dance activities.



# Literacy

## 3. Responding to the Book

Ernie is going to live in Arnhem Land. Where is Arnhem Land? On a map of Australia find Darwin, Arnhem Land, and the East Alligator River.

What seasons happen in most of the Southern Hemisphere? What seasons happen in most of the Northern Hemisphere? How are they different? List the six Arnhem Land seasons. The children try to recall what Ernie and his friends did in each season.

Place the six Arnhem Land seasons, approximately, into the months of the year.

The children work out the equivalent seasons in southern Australia. Could there be more than four seasons 'down south'?

The children try to create seasons which reflect the weather changes where they live, more accurately. For example, the windy season, the storm season, the dry season, the snow season.

For each southern season, the children list what they do. For example, Winter - go skiing, play soccer, play netball, turn on the heaters.



The children choose one character from the book. Under that character's name they write all of the things they did through the Arnhem Land seasons. The children write their own name. Underneath, they write the same number of things they do, through their seasons.

Using Ernie's letters to his friends as a model, the children write their own seasonal letters. For example, 'Dear Sara, it's Summer now, hot weather time. The Christmas Bells are flowering, and they look beautiful.'

# Visual Arts

## Picture Letters

Examine and discuss the format of the letters in this book, eg. simple sentences accompanied by bright, cartoon style illustrations.



Brainstorm activities in which the children in your class are involved, both during and outside of school, eg. swimming, sport, piano lessons, gym classes, school camps and excursions, helping parents cook, writing stories, etc.

Let children choose five of these activities and write their own picture letter to Ernie, telling him about what they would do during a day or week.

Illustrate it with brightly coloured, simple pictures using the same format as in the book.

## Make a Card Matching Game

Tessa teaches her friends some Kunwinjku words. The children could also learn some Kunwinjku words.

The illustrations and text below can be used to create a card matching game.

For example, the illustration card has a picture of a file snake (and a picture of Tammy if you can draw!). The text which matches it says 'Tammy catches a file snake'.

# Literacy

## 4. Going Beyond the Book

Do an author/illustrator study on Alison Lester. Other books she has written include, *Clive Eats Alligators*, *The Journey Home*, *Isabella's Bed* and *Magic Beach*.

