A is for Aunty
By Elaine Russell

Elaine Russell, the artist, illustrates her memories about her family and her life on a mission station in this book. Each picture, painted in acrylic and gouache, shows daily routines in her early life, based on a different letter of the alphabet. The book gives a sensitive and poignant insight into an Aboriginal's life, growing up on a mission with her family.

Literacy

1. Getting Ready for the Book

Alphabet books have traditionally been used to help young children identify familiar objects as well as letters and sounds. Alphabet books were among the first books published for children.

The children look at a number of alphabet books for younger and older children. For example, *Alice and Aldo* by Alison Lester, *A Apple Pie* by Kate Greenaway and reprinted, *ABC* by Jan Pienkowski, *Animal Capers* by Kerry Argent, *Animalia* by Graeme Base. What are the characteristics of alphabet books? List these on the board.

2. Responding to the Book

The following activities can be done after the book has been read through at least once.

Where is the Lachlan River? Why does it feature in the book?

Why did some Aboriginal people live on missions? Why did the manager's wife visit each house to make sure it was clean and tidy? How do you think the families felt? Should the manager's wife have been allowed to do this?

If you could have a special hidden place, where would it be? What would it look like? Who would know about it? What would you do there? Write and draw about your hidden place.

Design and draw your own billycart. Label each part. Explain your design to a friend.

Create games using available materials. Elaine Russell mentions marbles, hopscotch and peg dolls. What games could the children create using ordinary materials found in the classroom and playground? For example, games using stones, leaves, empty boxes, etc. Materials needed and instructions on how to play the game should also be included in the game.

Cook damper and try eating it with quandong jam.

Using the following interview sheet, the children read through the book and complete the questions from the author's point of view.

WHEN YOU WERE A CHILD

Where did you live?_____

What did your suburb or town look like? _____

Describe your house: _____

What games did you play? _____

Who was your best friend? _____

Where did your parents work? _____

What pets did you have? _____

What food did you eat? _____

How was it cooked? _____

Where did you go to school? _____

What did you do at school? _____

What were your teachers like? _____

What subjects did you like best? _____

What did you do for fun? _____

What adventures did you have? _____

The children then interview a grandparent or another older person, about what it was like when they were a child. The two interview sheets are compared. Are there any similarities? Differences? Are there similarities and differences to growing up today?

The author mentions a first aid kit in *Z is for Zinc Ointment*. Put together a class first aid kit. What should be included?

Visual Arts

2D artworks

Have each child select a letter of the alphabet and draw it in the centre of a blank sheet of paper. On another piece of paper, and with the help of a dictionary, have them list a variety of words beginning with that letter; school or home life may the initial stimulus for the words.

Illustrate the first sheet of paper with pictures of things which start with that letter. Let each child choose their selection of media to create their artwork, eg. textas, charcoal, coloured pencils, paint, watercolours, crayons, wax resist, etc.

Add a sentence describing what they have illustrated.

As a class, collect the illustrations and make them into an Alphabetical Big Book of the class's artwork or scan / digitally photograph the pictures and make them into as Powerpoint presentation.

Music

Duration (Beat and Rhythm)

To the tune *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* (*The Essential Arts Handbook*, page 203), sing the alphabet, using the Big Book prepared in the previous art activity, eg.

> *A, B, C, D, E, F, G,*
> *H, I J, K, L M ,N, O, P.*
> *Q, R, S,*
> *T, U V,*
> *Now I've sung my ABC,*
> *Sing it once again with me.*

Clap the beat of the song then clap the rhythm as it is being sung. Split the class in half and have one group clap the beat while the other half claps the rhythm of the song.
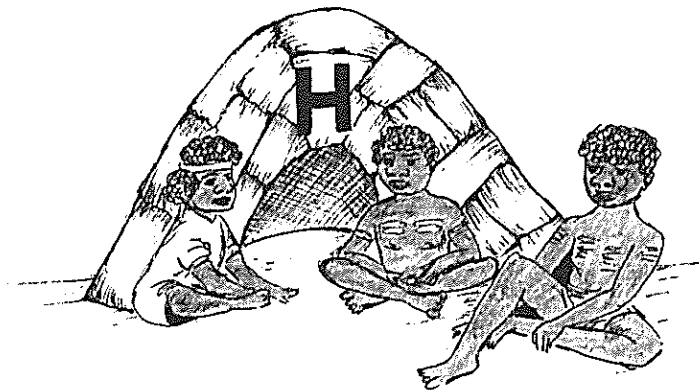
Dance

Alphabet Dance
Have a group of four children select one of the letters illustrated in the class Big Book, created in the previous visual arts activity. Have them list eight words that start with that letter and make them into an eight beat chant, eg.
> *Admiral, Athlete, Alien, Artist,*
> *Alligator, Arches, Apple and Ant.*

Each group then creates a series of movements to represent these words, using contrasting levels, directions, timing and qualities of movement. Practise them until the eight movements flow easily together.

Create a dance based on these eight movements, using repetition and contrast to make it interesting. Repeat it several times to music with a strong beat. Share the dance with the rest of the class.

Visual Arts

Art Appreciation
The illustrations in *A is for Aunty* is called naïve art, where the figures are simplified and often take on a symbolic rather than a real appearance. How does the illustrator use this technique? Why do you think the illustrator has chosen not to use a traditional Aboriginal painting style? How does the illustrator use colour? Brushstrokes?

The dust jacket on *A is For Aunty* folds out to become a large map. In groups, the children create a large map of their school, using the same style of painting as the illustrator. The children can also use the same style of illustration to create a picture of their own house and yard.

Literacy

3. Going Beyond the Book
Compare Ian Abdulla's book *As I Grew Older* to Elaine *Russell's A is For Aunty*.

Examine other illustrative maps such those often included in books which have a fantasy theme. For example, *The Deltora Quest* series, *The Hobbit*. Sally Morgan also paints maps from an Aboriginal perspective.