

MAIN ABIJA MY GRANDAD

By Karen Rogers

March 2021
ISBN 9781760526030
Format: Hardback
Recommended for 4-8 year olds

Summary

Dijan buk gada ola memri ai bin abum gada main abija from wen ai bin lilgel til imin libu wi. Imin titjim mi loda tings bla koltja en bla kantri. Mi hepi ba pasim det stori la main femili en bla pudum la dis buk.

This book has the memories I had of my grandfather from when I was small until he left us. He taught me many things about culture and country. I'm happy to pass this story on to my family and to put it in this book.

With luscious artwork and a lyrical text in Kriol and English, celebrated Ngukurr artist Karen Rogers evokes the world of her childhood in a remote part of the Northern Territory. Her story is a beautiful celebration of a special relationship, showing how culture is passed on from generation to generation.

'My grandfather touched my heart. I hope everybody can have a chance to love one grandparent that way.'

Author Style

Karen Rogers' story about her grandad is not only a touching tribute to their relationship, but an authentic and wonderful insight into life in remote communities and the passing down of cultural ways from older to younger generations.

About Kriol

Main Abija My Grandad is written in Kriol and English. Kriol is the name given to a language spoken across a large part of Northern Australia, mostly in the Katherine region of the Northern Territory and in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Kriol developed in the early days of European colonisation, after Pidgin English was introduced to these areas in the late 1800s. Kriol developed to be a fully formed language, and in some places like Ngukurr (where this story was written), it has been the main language of the community for about 100 years. Kriol is based on English, but because there are so many little differences in pronunciation, in how sentences are made, in changes in meanings of words as well as using words from First Nations Australian languages, Kriol is treated as a language of its own rather than as a dialect of English.

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Activities

Before opening *Main Abija My Grandad*, hold the cover up and ask students what they think this story will be about. Talk about who the two characters in the illustration might be and where they might live. Ask children what kind of a story they expect this to be: happy or sad, set in a city or the outback, funny or serious, and what in the illustration or title helped them to form their answer.

Literacy

Complete the following comprehension questions after reading the book:

1. In what part of Australia is Ngukurr located?
2. With whom did Karen Rogers spend her holidays as a child?
3. What kind of activities did she do when she was on holiday?
4. What are cultural ways?
5. Where did she look for sugarbag (bush honey)?
6. What important job did her abija do?
7. What was the name and colour of his horse?
8. Why did Karen live with her grandad when she was five or six years old?
9. What did her grandad teach Karissa, Karen Rogers' daughter, many years later?
10. What is Karen Rogers doing for her grandchildren and great-grandson, same as her grandad did for her?

English: Language

Ask students how they would describe the abija in this story. What words does the author use to describe him? What things does she describe him doing that reflect how much he loved his granddaughter? Ask students to come up with words to describe an older family member or friend. What things do the students love doing with this person, and what things have they learned from them?

Humanities and Social Sciences

Grandad sang in language and he explained whose Dreaming was there and which Country it belonged to. That old man taught me and my family cultural ways.

Ask students to prepare some questions to interview older members of their own family.

Questions might include:

1. How did you live when you were growing up?
2. Where did you live?
3. What places, traditions, skills and activities were important to you then? And now?
4. What was the most important lesson you learned as a child?
5. How is a modern childhood different to what you experienced?

Humanities and Social Sciences

Karen Rogers comes from the Ngukurr Community. Ask students to name the community they consider themselves to be a part of. Ask them to draw a map of this community and describe the things and people who are part of it.

History

The Ngukurr Community was established around 1908. Ask older students to research it online and find out:

1. Why was the community formed?
2. How many languages are spoken in Ngukurr?
3. Why is Kriol so important in this community?

Languages

Show students the map at the beginning of *Main Abija My Grandad* and point out the remote towns and communities in the Northern Territory of Australia where Kriol is spoken. Choose one of the towns or communities shown on the map and ask students to find out about that place. Have them research schools in the area and check whether there is any mention of teaching Kriol on those schools' websites or Facebook pages.

Languages

Explain that Kriol, like any language, has its own alphabet and its own way of spelling and pronouncing words. The Kriol alphabet is very similar to the English alphabet, but there are some differences. The English alphabet has 26 letters. Kriol uses 21. Ask students to read through *Main Abija My Grandad* and see if they can pick which five English letters **are not** used in Kriol. This webpage will help students learn more about the Kriol alphabet:

https://meigimkriolstrongbala.org.au/en_au/resource/kriol-elfabet-poster/

Languages

In Ngukurr, Kriol speakers are very specific when talking about grandparents. A grandpa on your mum’s side (mum’s dad) is your abija. A grandpa on your dad’s side is your amuri. There’s no one word in Kriol that just means *grandpa* or *grandfather*. Ask students what they call their own grandparents. Do they use different words for different grandparents? Why? Maybe grandparents from their dad’s side are called something different from grandparents from their mum’s side.

Languages

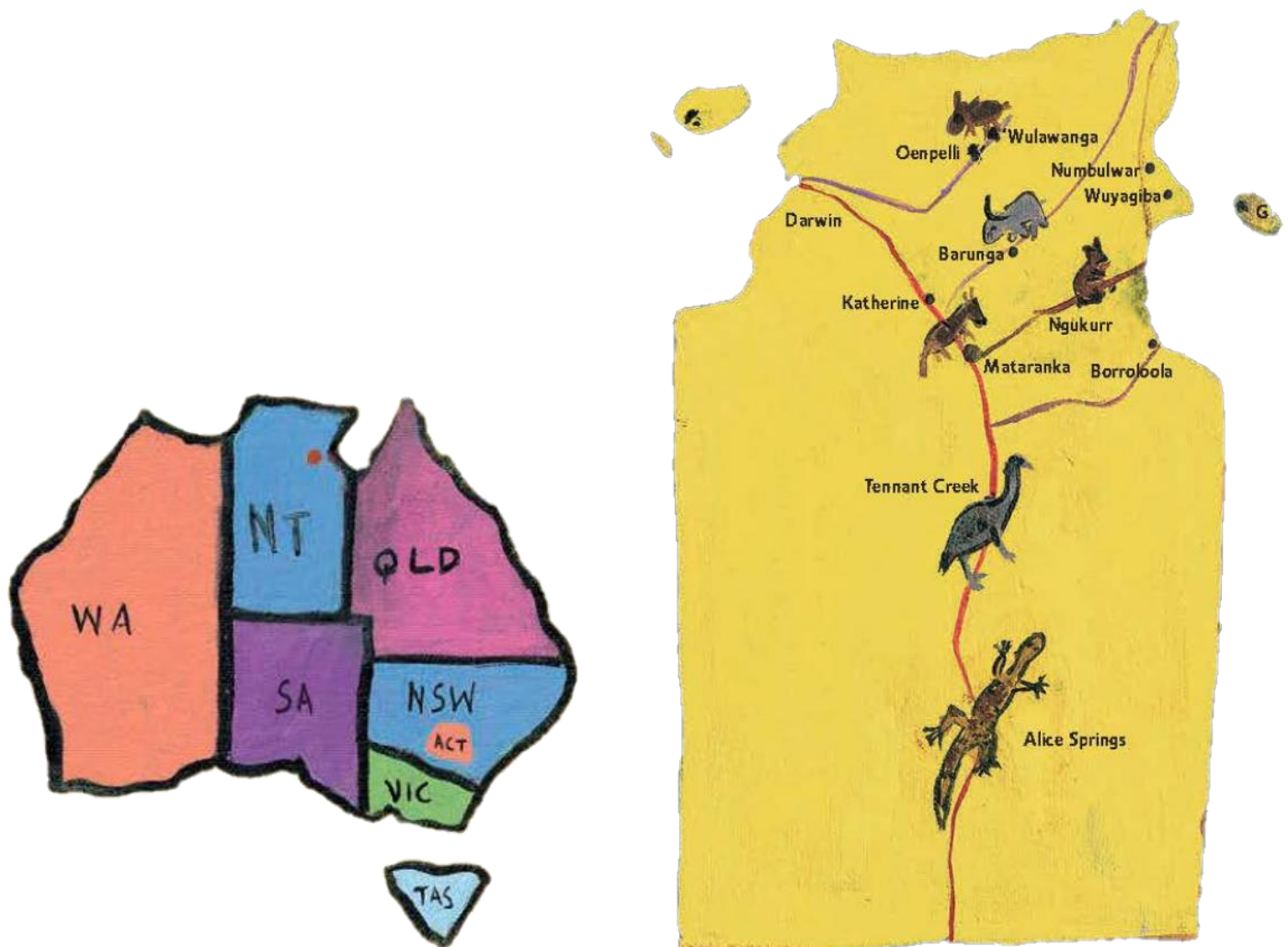
In a general discussion, ask students if they can guess how many languages there are in the world. (The answer is approximately 6,500, or for an exact figure, see <https://www.ethnologue.com/guides/how-many-languages>).

Make a list of all the languages spoken by students in your class.

Art

Have students look up the Ngukurr Arts Centre online, and see if they can find the author on there! Have students compare Karen’s artworks on this page to her artwork in the book.

<https://ngukurrarts.com/artist/karen-rogers/>



About the Author

Karen Rogers comes from Ngukurr Community in South East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory. Her artwork comes from cultural knowledge and her feelings for the land. She lives with her family in Ngukurr and has five children, eight grandkids and one great-grandson. Karen studied Visual Art at Batchelor Institute, inspired by her grandmother and grandmother's sisters, who were all artists. She works with textiles, glass and canvas and is currently working on animation. She loves learning new skills and different art forms. In 2018, she was artist in residence at Glassworks, Canberra, and in 2020 she received a Creative Fellowship from Arts NT. *Main Abija My Grandad* is her first picture book.

What Karen Rogers Says about Her Art:

'I was working as a pay roll officer when my grandma passed away. It was a really sad and stressful time for me. I got crook. It was when I was thinking about her, after she passed, that I started seeing her painting in my mind. I remembered that way she used to paint. So I started to paint too. It helped me manage my stress. It made me feel free. I decided to study art then. I used to study business management, but it never gave me that same feeling.

'It was when I was studying at Batchelor Institute that I found a painting of my grandmother's that I had never seen. It looked the same to me as what I was painting at the time. I felt like my grandmother was talking to me and telling me to be an artist. That it was right.



'My grandma and all of her sisters were artists. They are known here as the "Seven Sisters" and they started this Ngukurr Arts Centre. They had exhibitions in Melbourne and everywhere.

'I paint a lot of dragonflies because that it is my grandma's dreaming. But I can't paint my own dreaming. That is our law. I can only paint it when I am painting moiety groups. Moiety is our cultural way. We have skin names and dreamings, animal dreamings, to tell us where we belong. Through our culture you learn what is important. It is the Aboriginal way. If I grew up in town, I would not know that and I would have to come here to learn from my family.'

What Karen Rogers Says about Her Writing:

'When I first sat down and wrote the book, I wrote about the sadness I had about my grandfather's funeral and his death. But after working on that story I decided to write more about the memories I had of enjoying life with him. Death is important in our community. If there is a funeral, I've got to go. If you give respect, you get respect back. I want kids to think about that and talk about that.

'I also want my kids to learn to read English and Kriol. It is important to me to write in my language. I think this book will make my family happy. I hope anyone who reads it will think about their grandparents. In that way it is the same, blackfella way and munanga (whitefella) way.

'I really enjoyed the process of writing a book – telling something to people about my own story. Our cultural way is very different from the munanga way. We are strict with our culture. We are passing it on from generation to generation. I don't tell all of it. I tell a little bit of it.'

