

Teachers Notes
by Janet Anderson

Flytrap

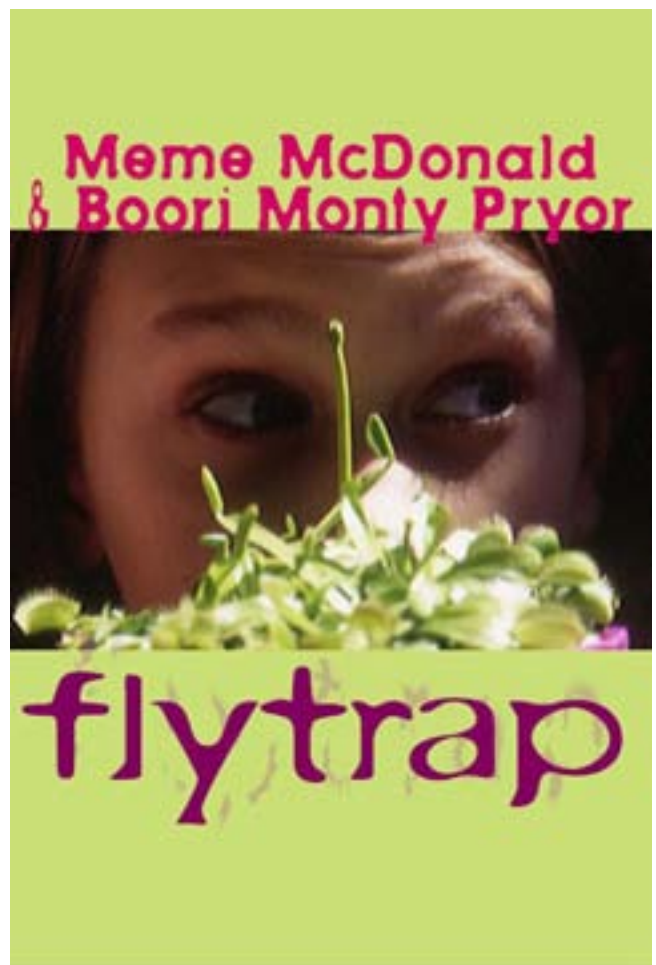
Meme McDonald & Boori Pryor

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Recommended for ages 6-11

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THE AUTHORS

Boori and Meme met in Melbourne when they were working for the Wurundjeri people, the traditional custodians of that area. They started talking about writing books. Meme had already written two books, *Put Your Whole Self In* (Penguin) and *The Way of the Birds* (Allen & Unwin). Boori had at least three books going around in his head but was busy performing dances, playing didgeridoo and storytelling in schools.

When Meme and Boori speak about their experiences and the books they have created together, they combine their skills as storytellers to touch on issues of significance for people of all ages: healing the past and creating positive visions for the future; finding strength within to deal with the challenges from without; survival, optimism and finding a basis for mutual, and self, respect.

INTRODUCTION

To help provide background for these notes, Meme McDonald and Boori Monty Pryor shared their knowledge of the place of stories and storytelling in Indigenous Cultures, the relationship between stories, painting and other forms of expression and the importance Aboriginal people place on the people groups they belong to and their heritage. The activities below seek to provide opportunities for children to come to a deeper understanding of these concepts.

Flytrap is a beautiful exploration of the place of oral language in all cultures. The book illustrates the different functions stories fulfil: to get us out of trouble, to tell us who we are, to provide enjoyment, help us understand our family, build relationships between people and give us our identity. It provides an inspiring stimulus for activities in the classroom with an oral language emphasis.

GETTING STARTED

Read and enjoy the book with the class initially. Then revisit the parts highlighted below so that the children can explore and respond to them through the following activities.

TALL TALES

In the 'Acknowledgements' section of *Flytrap*, Meme and Boori tell us that a 'tall tale' provided the inspiration for this book. On page 13, Nancy's mum tells a fantastic 'tall tale' to explain why Nancy can't take the Venus Flytrap to school. The humour in her story is so effective because she combines the ordinary (the cat next door and Hughie Roberson eating Coco Pops) with the ridiculous (the Venus Flytrap flying through the air, over rooftops and into the neighbour's window).

ORAL STORYTELLING

Have students construct their own 'tall tales' combining the ordinary with the ridiculous to provide alternative explanations of what has happened to prevent Nancy taking the Venus Flytrap to school.

Start with a class story as a form of oral brainstorming. Seat the class in a circle and begin with the sentence from the book, "Maybe I can't bring my Venus Flytrap to school because . . .". Have each child around the circle add a sentence to the story, remembering that it is a 'tall tale'.

Then have the children work in groups of three or four to refine the ideas from the class story and make up a group story. Have them rehearse the story and tell it to the class. Each person in the group must participate in telling the story. Use a tape recorder to record these presentations.

CAPTIONS

The four photographs on pages 14 and 15 accompany Nancy's mum's 'tall tale' about the Venus Flytrap flying into Hughie Robertson's window as he was eating his Coco Pops. Have the children write a caption for each of the photographs.

STORYBOARDS

A storyboard is a cartoon version of a story. It consists of a number of frames, each like a camera shot showing the visual action, with the dialogue underneath. Have the children draw a four-frame storyboard for their group's 'tall tale'. Complete the activity individually first and then have the children compare their storyboard with those of the others in their group. Have them explain why they chose these particular images for the storyboard.

This activity involves the following processes:

- deciding which aspects of the story are important
- sequencing the important aspects
- linking the aspects meaningfully

Once the children understand the processes involved, repeat the activity with one of the stories within *Flytrap*. Choose a story and draw a four-frame storyboard version of it.

TREASURES IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

On page 17, Gee brings home an echidna killed on the road. 'Poor little fullus,' he says. 'It's a waste to leave them lying there.' Even in this unexpected place, he can see the beauty and value of the birds and animals. To Nancy, they are all treasures with a story to tell.

MASKS

Make a mask of a parrot, an owl, an eagle or a cockatoo based upon the vivid descriptions on page 18.

WRITTEN STORIES

Write a beautiful story about that bird's life in the wild for some of the younger classes (Kindergarten or Year One). A review of narrative structure with the class will assist them in writing a story about the bird's life (see below). The class should also consider the audience of younger children and the types of stories they enjoy. Review some picture books about animals for the younger age group to provide extra inspiration for those who need it for this task.

Have the children take the mask and the story to one of the younger classes in the school and wear the mask as they tell/read the story.

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Writing a narrative together as a class with the teacher scribing (joint construction) is an excellent way of reviewing narrative structure and preparing students for writing individually.

Orientation	This introduces the main characters in a setting of time and place. It 'alerts' the reader to what is to follow.
Complication	A problem or crisis arises which leads to a sequence of events. These events are evaluated by the characters.
Resolution	The problems of the complication are resolved. A pattern of normalcy is restored, but the main character/s has changed as a result of the experience.

THE BINGGALDAMBA

FROZEN SCULPTURES

The story of how Binggaldamba got his quills is on pages 24 to 26. Have children prepare five frozen sculptures to accompany a reading of the story. Frozen Sculptures involve using human bodies to depict, in frozen form, a character, feeling or mood.

Organise the children into groups of four or five. Have them examine the story and break it into five sections, each to be depicted by a frozen sculpture (begin with 'Long time ago this one fulla was really greedy.' on page 24 and end with 'That echidna still don't know where he's going.'" on page 26). One person becomes the sculptor who takes the lead in placing the other group members into position for each sculpture. Variety is possible as the sculptures need not focus only on the action in the story but also on the characters, feelings and mood. The sculptor then reads the story, pausing at the beginning of each of the five sections for the group members to get into position for each of the sculptures.

CHARACTER PROFILE

Meme McDonald says that the two paintings in the book by cousin Lillian Fourmile differ in the layers that they reveal: The painting 'The Two Yams' is a story painting while 'The Binggaldamba' is a character painting. Use the information on pages 24 to 26 to complete a 'character profile' on the Binggaldamba. The following proforma includes some categories that could be addressed:

The Binggaldamba	
Physical Description	
Distinguishing Features	
Best Known For	
Good Habits	
Bad Habits	
Skills	
Occupation	
Friends	
Enemies	
Relationships With Others	
Illustration	



This activity could be repeated with Nancy as the subject of the character profile. This would be most effective if done after completing the activities for the Story of the Two Yams on pages 6-8 of these Notes.

WHEN I WAS LITTLE

On pages 32 to 42 Nancy's mum tells her stories about growing up on a sheep farm. This storytelling is an important time of special closeness between the two, when intrusions from the outside world (telephone calls, emails and faxes) are ignored. This reflects the importance in Indigenous Cultures of the groups that people belong to and where they have come from.

SPOKEN RECOUNTS

Create an opportunity for children to find out about where they have come from by hearing stories about people in their own families and then recounting these to the rest of the class. As a class, prepare a list of questions about growing up for the children to take home and ask either parents or grandparents. Have the children use a tape recorder or take rough notes to record the session at home and then choose one story or incident to retell to the rest of the class. Help them prepare by organising the information into a recount structure (see below) and practise retelling in small groups.

Recount Structure

Orientation	Information about who, where and when.
Record of Events	Usually recounted in chronological order.
Personal Comments	These are interspersed throughout the record of events.
Reorientation	Rounds off the sequence of events.

EXPLORING DIFFERENT MEDIA

In Indigenous Cultures, the same story can be told in words, painting, dance or song. Following the spoken recounts, have children use one of these other media to retell their family's story.

In preparation for this, look at the drawings of the flytrap and blowflies by Harry Todd, Meme and Boori's 11 year old nephew. There are drawings on the following pages: 19, 30, 31, 44, and 48. Talk with the class about the drawing and get their ideas about them:

- How do the drawings add to atmosphere in the book?
- How is the 'flytrap' portrayed? Can you get a sense of its personality?
- At what point in the book are the drawings used? Why?

Challenge the children to find four more of Harry Todd's drawings in the book!

ACROSTIC POEM

'Nancy and her mum take their time to cuddle and wonder, making out shapes in the shadow dance.' (p. 42) There is an atmosphere of closeness and wonder in these pages, encapsulated particularly in the photographs on pages 39 and 42 and the phrase 'mothering-up'. Encourage children to respond to this by writing an acrostic poem based on the phrase 'mothering-up'.

Help them prepare for this by discussing the following:

- Who did the lamb 'mother-up' to?

- Did Nancy's mum 'mother-up' any other animals?
- How do the photographs of the animals in these pages make you feel?
- What does it mean on page 39, 'Nancy snuggles in next to her, glad to be mothered-up.'?
- How do the photographs on pp. 39 and 42 make you feel?
- How do you think Nancy and her mum are feeling?

Illustrate the poem with either a drawing or a photograph.

THE STORY OF TWO YAMS

STORIES IN INDIGENOUS CULTURES

On pp. 53 to 57 Nancy tells her class the Story of The Two Yams that Gee brought back for her along with her necklace. This is the story that Gee alludes to while he and Nancy are boiling the echidna. At that time, despite Nancy's pestering, Gee says that she has to wait for the story. This reflects an aspect of Indigenous Cultures that dictates that people be a particular age or maturity before they receive certain stories. In receiving stories people are given what Meme McDonald refers to as 'what they can hold' and need to be at the 'right point' to get the right story or right part of the story. Indigenous Cultures not only dictate who can be told what at what time, but also which parts need to be left out, kept secret.

Nancy's experience with the Story of the Two Yams reflects this beautifully. Use an examination of her experience as an opportunity to explore these aspects with the class. The following questions help to structure this exploration:

- Did Nancy hear the Story of the Two Yams the first time she wanted to (p. 29)?
Why?
- What reason did Gee give for telling her the story when he returned from Nanna's? (p. 47)
- Has the story made Nancy stronger?
How do we know?
- Why is she no longer trying to come up with a tall tale to tell Miss Susan?
- What do you think of the way Nancy solves the problem of not having a Venus Flytrap?
- What parts of the story mustn't she tell to her whole class?
Why?
- What part of the story couldn't Nancy hear?
Why?

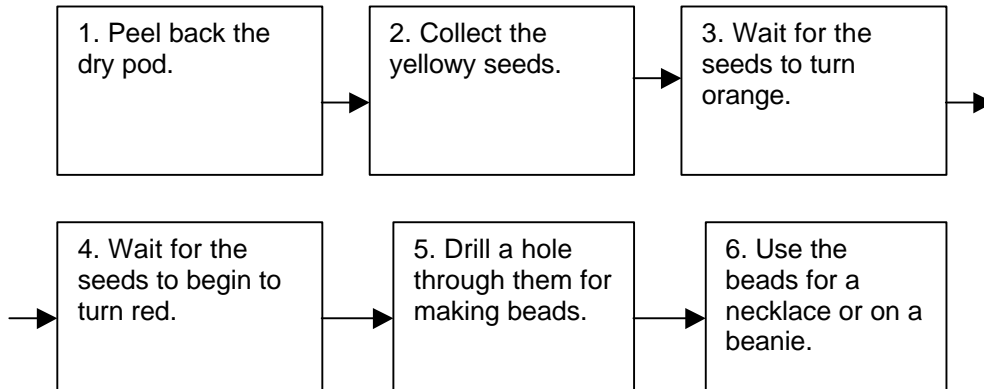
MAKING BEADS

On page 58, Nancy shows the seed-pods to the class and explains the steps involved in the process of making red beads from them. Earlier in the book (pp. 27 – 28); Gee explained this same process to Nancy, passing down the knowledge and skills that are part of her heritage.

Have children share something that they have learned from their parents/family as an oral presentation. They might share about cooking, a hobby, a game or a tradition (putting up the Christmas tree) that is special in their family.

In preparation, summarise Nancy's talk to the class onto a flow chart (see next page).

Making Beads

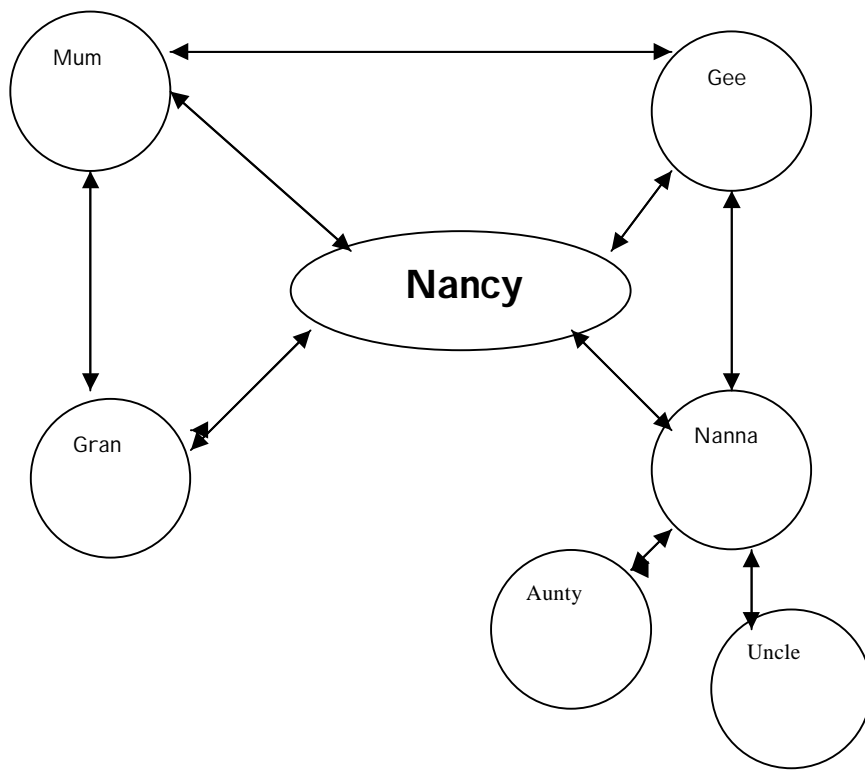


There are photographs that illustrate each of these steps throughout the book. Transfer each of the steps in the flow chart onto a post-it note and attach these to the corresponding photographs on the following pages: 20, 21, 27, 46, 47, and 58.

Use a flow chart proforma to help the children prepare for their oral presentations. Have a special day where they share their presentations with the class. Invite parents to come and be part of the day.

NANCY'S GROUP

'She can hear Gee's voice speaking through her. And Nanna's and his aunty's and uncle's voices through him. And all the other voices of all the other storytellers' (p. 54). Nancy finds an inner sense of strength and identity as she tells the Story of the Two Yams from Gee; shows the seeds pods from Nanna and the wool from Gran; and talks about her mum swallowing a mouthful of flies. She feels connected with the group she belongs to. Have the children show this diagrammatically by drawing the relationships between people in Nancy's group and what they contribute to her. Use the format on the next page as a starting point.



Repeat the activity with children diagramming their own group and recording the contributions that the people in their group make.

THE PAINTING OF THE TWO YAMS

Lillian Fourmile's painting is the first ever done of this story and she had to go back through her uncle to find a way to paint it. The painting is used more than once in the book. It is the first thing the reader sees after the title of the book. Ask the children why they think the story is so important in the book. Talk about what the story does for Nancy.

Lillian's style reflects the knowledge of painting that has been passed down among the Kunggandji people of North Queensland. Have children research painting that is particular to the people from their local area. Visit the ATSIC website for information at www.atsic.gov.au. Go to 'Our People'. Go to 'Visual Arts and Crafts Directory'. You could also try your local art gallery for information.

MEME'S WEBSITE

Visit Meme's website at www.mememcdonald.com to learn more about her, her writing partnership with Boori Monty Prior and her other books. Look particularly at 'Out and About'. Does anything remind you of 'Flytrap'? heroes.