Teachers Notes
by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

Wool, Wagons and Clipper Ships
Transport, Trade and Travel in Australia 1830s – 1880s

by
John Nicholson
ISBN 9781741751987
Recommended for ages 9 yrs or older

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INTRODUCTION

Continuing the story of Australia’s early traders, John Nicholson turns his attention (in this third book in his five book series, *Transport Trade and Travel in Australia*) to examining the wool industry and the various forms of transport required to support its growth. In *Wool, Wagons and Clipper Ships (1830s-1880s)* he describes the heyday of Australia’s export of wool to other countries, and the huge successes reaped by squatters, sheep station owners and others. It also details the many problems faced, and the issues confronted by those who were not as fortunate as their employers.

It describes other related industries such as cattle grazing, wheat growing, and mining.

And it tells many fascinating stories. For example, it traces the growth of the Cobb & Co coaches carrying mail and passengers and goods all over the continent. It tells of the hair-raising escapades of the clipper-ship captains who raced each other to arrive at overseas wool auctions. And it describes how the ‘Gold Rush’ influenced the trade as well.

It shows (like Book 2) how the early import and export of goods to and from Australia was influenced not only by its colonial ties with the United Kingdom but also by its interaction with many traders from a variety of cultures.

*Previous books in the series include:* Book 1 – *Songlines and Stone Axes* which details the trading practices already in place amongst Aboriginal people, and shows how the arrival of European settlers not only displaced Aboriginal people but destroyed their trading networks and altered the land dramatically. *Book 2 – Cedar, Seals and Whaling Ships* described the way in which European settlement transformed the land and established a network of transport which continues to this day.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

*Themes* suggested by the book which might be explored with class groups include:

- Trading and Trading Practices
- Transport and Travel (including roads, waterways and shipping)
- Secondary and Primary Industries
- Land and Property Ownership (Competition and Rivalry)
- Workers Rights
- Historical Accuracy

*Topics* which relate to these themes fall into *Curriculum areas* such as:

- SOSE/HSIE – Studying Society and Societal Issues
- Language and Literacy
- Creative Arts
- Food & Public Health
- Maths

* * *
SOSE/HSIE

In this curriculum area there are several topics you might explore with your students:

1. THE WOOL INDUSTRY & OTHER TRADES

This book continues the tale of the growth of trading practices in Australia, and the effect it had on the infrastructure of Australia. [For a list of Outcomes, see Teachers Notes on Book 2.]

In particular it focuses on the wool industry in Australia which is a tale (like those of the whaling, sealing and cedar industries discussed in Book 2) of rise and decline. It was first developed by those who were ‘given’ land by the Colonial government, and then by squatters who first took up land outside official boundaries. Later, in 1836, such ‘squatting’ became legal, and still later squatters were even able to buy the land they were already farming.

*Question*: The scale of the industry is indicated by the expression ‘sheep stations as big as Scotland’ (p. 6). What disadvantages might there have been in managing such huge tracts of land?

*Activity*: The table (p. 7) shows how rapidly the numbers of sheep in Australia increased, from 6000 in 1800 to 62 000 000 in 1880. What effect did such ‘introduced’ species have on the land?

*Activity*: The following six occupations are mentioned in the book. Find information and write a brief definition of each one. 1. Squatter... 2. Swagman... 3. Shepherd... 4. Bullocky... 5. Groom... 6. Whip...

*Activity*: Read about bullockies (p. 17). Write your own description of a bullocky.

*Activity*: The book covers the wheat trade (p. 22); Cattle breeding and grazing; and copper and gold mining. Research any one of these other industries.

*Question*: Nicholson mentions ‘cattle kings’ (p. 9). Who were some of the cattle kings? Research a number of them.

QUIZ

*Questions:*

1. What do the following expressions mean? ‘Barcoo rot’ and ‘sandy blight’.
2. Who discovered a machine for separating the wheat grain from the stalks, and what was its name?
3. When and where was copper first discovered by European settlers in Australia?
4. Who brought camels to Australia from India to start an outback transport business?
5. What were ‘corduroy roads’?
6. Who began wool auctions in Sydney, and when?
7. Who was the rival wool auctioneer operating from Melbourne?
8. What port became the centre of Australia’s wool trade by the 1880s?
9. What ship disappeared after leaving Port Phillip Bay bound for England in 1853?
10. What was a thoroughbrace?

*Answers*: 1. ‘Barcoo rot’ is a chronic skin infection caused by vitamin deficiency, and ‘sandy blight’ is Trachoma – a very infectious eye disease common in places where there
was little water for washing. 2. John Ridley began production of his Ridley’s Wheat Stripper (based on a design by John Bull) in 1843. 3. At Kapunda (SA) in 1842. 4. Farmer and trader Thomas Elder. 5. Roads made by lying logs side by side to form a hard surface. 6. Thomas Mort in 1843. 7. Richard Goldsborough. 8. Port Phillip, Victoria 9. The Madagascar. 10. The Concord coaches used by Cobb and Co were supported by two leather straps called ‘thoroughbraces’, rather than by steel springs (which were easily broken).

2. TEAMS, WAGONS AND COACHES

The transport of all sorts of goods by teams of wagons pulled by bullocks is described (p. 11). The growth of this form of travel had several effects on the development of Australia.

Activity: Write a list of the effects of such teams on:
   a) trade
   b) communication
   c) landscape
   d) road networks

Question: What were the hazards faced by such teams?

Question: What are the differences between wagons, carts and drays? (See p. 12.)

Question: What are the differences between gigs, sulkies and chaises? (See p. 26.)

Question: Who was Australia’s first coach builder? (See p. 27.)

Activity: Freeman Cobb was the founder of what would become the famous Cobb & Co. How long did he stay in Australia? The man who really ‘made’ the company was his successor James Rutherford. Try to find out more about both men.

Question: What forced the end of Cobb and Co and other such horse-drawn forms of road transport? (See p. 30.)

Question: When did the last Cobb and Co coach pull into Surat? (See p. 30.)

3. BULLOCKS, HORSES AND CAMELS

The important role played by various animals in early trade, and the way in which men and women relied on them, is outlined.

Activity: Examine the table comparing the virtues of bullocks, horse or camels for teamwork (pp. 14-15). Conduct a debate in the class, on the various advantages and disadvantages of each of these forms of transport animal.

Activity: Read about walers (p. 10). The export of these extremely strong, fast horses to overseas military campaigns was done in huge numbers. Try and find out more about this subject.

Activity: Read about camels and cameleers, and the people involved in the animals’ import to Australia.

Activity: A number of types of bullocks are listed (pp. 14-15). As a class project, create a chart with the names of each type of bullock, and its definition. Illustrate the listing with an appropriate drawing.

Activity: Some interesting statistics on manure and urine are listed (p. 25)! Read more about the care of horses and the many uses to which they were put before automobiles assumed such importance.
Activity: The table (p. 26) shows the decline in the number of horses in Australia from 1860-1990. Try to find out how many there are today.

4. ROAD BUILDING
This Book 3 (like Book 2 in the series) details the impact on road development which early events and forms of transport had. Because roads were often built in response to events such as the Gold Rush, they were created hurriedly and went to surprisingly out-of-the-way places many kilometres inland from the coast. On p. 19 the book lists some of the road developments which occurred.

Activity: Did you know that many early roads were paved in timber? Try to find out more about this subject.

Activity: The Hume Highway is mentioned (p. 19). Try to find out whether there are other highways in Australia which date from the mid-nineteenth century.

Question: What industries were influential in deciding where roads were built?

5. CLIPPER SHIPS & OTHER FORMS OF SAILING
Clipper ships were the form of transport used to transport both emigrants to Australia, and the loads of wool, wheat and other goods back to the UK.

Question: The Sabraon was a popular ship and one of the fastest clipper ships to visit Australia. What was it later used for?

Question: What were the hazards faced by clipper ships in carrying wool and wheat to overseas markets?

Activity: Research the City of Adelaide, one of only two surviving clipper ships to have carried people from the British Isles to any destination, and from England to Australia. [See ‘Significance to South Australia.’]
http://www.cityofadelaide.org.au/SA_Significance.shtml It is the oldest (1864) surviving clipper ship in the world.[See ‘Australia’s Maritime World Nautical News.’
http://www.maritimeworld.net/nn.asp?PageNumber=316]

Activity: Pirates are always a fascination for young students. Research pirate stories in the nineteenth century.

6. THE GOLD RUSH
In 1851 gold was discovered in NSW and Victoria. Many abandoned their former occupations and headed for the fields. Many new emigrants arrived in hope of sharing in these new-found fortunes. It’s said that £1,000,000 worth of gold was discovered in that one year! (p. 19)

Activity: Research the gold rushes and the effect they had on trade and transport.

Activity: Research the range of nationalities who arrived and how this affected Australia’s cultural makeup, and the diversity of our culture.

Question: What political and/or legislative effects did the Gold Rush have?

Question: The Eureka Stockade is a famous incident in 1854 during which the gold miners revolted against the officials supervising the mining of gold in the fields near Ballarat. Research and write about it. Read Nadia Wheatley’s A Banner Bold: The Diary of Rosa Aarons (2000). This is one of the Scholastic My Australian Story series which are fictional accounts of real events in Australia’s history, offering an entertaining account of how a child might have responded in such an era. Discuss.
7. WORKERS RIGHTS ISSUES
The plight of badly paid and exploited workers in Australia led to the growth of unionism, and to famous incidents such as the Shearers' Strike of 1891, which ultimately led to the foundation of the Australian Labor Party, commemorated by the famous Tree of Knowledge at Barcaldine in Queensland. [See ‘Tree of Knowledge.’ http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/national/sites/tree-factsheet.html]

**Question:** What examples in this book did you discover of workers being abused or put in danger?

**Activity:** Research the contribution of a particular culture to the development of Australia in the wool or another industry. eg Afghans, Chinese, Aboriginal etc.

**Activity:** Poverty also led to prejudice. The riot at Lambing Flat in 1860-1, for example, was caused by the resentment of European prospectors who were distrustful of, and resented the successes of, the Chinese in collecting gold. [See ‘The Lambing Flat Rebellion.’ http://members.ozemail.com.au/~natinfo@ozemail.com.au/1lambing.htm]

8. HISTORICAL FIGURES
Each book in this series mentions several historical figures who had a significant effect on Australia’s development, and whom students might choose to research. In this third book, examples include: Robert Campbell, Richard Goldsborough and Thomas Mort, John Ridley, Thomas Elder, Abdul Wadi, James Baines, John Francis, George Cook, Freeman Cobb. There are many biographical series and websites which will give students information on such figures. (See Bibliography in these notes for ideas.)

**Question:** Where might you find information on these figures?

**Activity:** Debate the positive and negative effects of the role of one of these people in Australia’s development.

9. HISTORICAL ACCURACY
This book, and the earlier books in the series, refer several times to the difficulty of corroborating some facts and to the existence of conflicting information (p. 27). The series challenges received views of the early colony’s history by including several curious facts which you may not find in other history books, and which are worth exploring further:

**Activity:** This book asserts that using the term ‘Afghans’ for people who worked the early camel trade in Australia is erroneous, since the people were actually people from the Pakistani province of Baluchistan (p. 17). However, the borders of the countries in the region of Afghanistan and its surrounds have actually changed a number of times, so that it may be possible to, in effect, justify the description as well. Read ‘The Land and People of Baluchistan.’ http://www.geocities.com/pak_history/baluchistan.html Discuss.

LITERACY & LANGUAGE
Each book in this series offers a rich source of language and narrative which might be explored in a range of activities.

FACTION
Faction is a literary technique in which authors ‘imagine’ the real stories of people in the past, based on their knowledge of their lifestyle, work practices, landscape and
environment. This book begins (pp. 5-6) with an imagined incident in which a bullocky is on a journey accompanied by his blue-heeler dog, Dusty, and his teams of bullock 'offsiders' – Toddy, Ned, Molly, Skaggle, Taverner, Miles, Tiger, Whiskey, Sam, Wheeler, Vassek and Neville. Telling such individuals’ stories is a vital part of the creation of national history and local history.

**Activity:** Read this story with the class. Read (p. 15) how bullocks are trained not only to remember their names but the words which describe what they are meant to do as part of a team. Then have students create their own story inspired by any aspect of the information in this work.

**Activity:** Research faction. For example, read the article by Gary Crew ('Fiction, Nonfiction and the Limits of Faction’, *Magpies*, Vol 19, Issue 2, May 2004, pp. 8-10) which discusses faction in his books.

**Activity:** Read the tricks people played on the owners of horses tethered in streets (p. 27). Ask the students to write a humorous short text based on this idea.

**VOCABULARY**

**Words or phrases used commonly in past times or in particular industries** are often lost or forgotten.

**Activity:** Create a glossary of words in this book that you haven’t heard before. Use this glossary to test the class. After they’ve read this book, ask students to define any of the words in that list. Who got the highest score?

**Activity:** The skipper of the *Noormubul* advertised for passengers in the *Hobart Examiner* in the 1850s: ‘Applicants for passages [to London] to be made early – or the cabin will be filled with wool.’ (p. 20) Create your own amusing advertisement based on some aspect of the trade which you’ve read about in this book.

**VISUAL LITERACY**

**Visual Literacy** is an aspect of this text and the other books in the series which you might like to explore. In Nicholson's images he draws on his research into history in order to choose incidents which are likely to appeal to his readers, and then he faithfully transcribes the details of this past in the features of architecture, artefacts and landscape to give students both an accurate and an imaginative view of history.

**Activity:** Read ‘Conversation between John Nicholson and Rosalind Price’ *Magpies* Vol 11, Issue 4, September 1996, pp. 8-13. What insights did this give you into his art?

**Activity:** Study the use of perspective, and the creation of texture in his drawings. For example the images of road surfaces (p. 18). Try to draw an image which appeals to you using some of his techniques.

Some images are viewed not from the horizontal but from the view above [eg. See the bullock team (pp. 14-15). How does this change your view of a picture?]

**Foregrounding** is another technique which artists use to make a picture interesting [eg. See the penned sheep (p. 6-7) or the street scene (pp. 24-25). By skilfully enlarging the sheep at the front of the image, and the people and horses at the front of the second, Nicholson gives the images a three dimensional effect.]

The idea of movement is suggested in the three sequential drawings of the bullock and the bullocky on the back cover of the book. This is a filmic technique often used by artists to lend dynamism to an image. It requires that there be consistency in detail as well as differences between the three images. Students might like to create a sequence of images like this one.

**Scale, measurement and detail** are important in visually creating a picture [eg. the
wagon (p. 12-13) or the ships (pp. 20-21). Students might like to choose a complicated image like either of these and discover the challenges involved in creating it.]

CREATIVE ARTS
This non-fiction text contains or suggests a range of exciting stories which could offer stimulus for several creative arts activities.

Visual Arts activities might include: creating a diorama of scenes described in the text; painting a picture or creating a collage suggestive of any one of the many themes it contains. A nearby art gallery or museum might house artworks depicting the gold rushes, bullockies or other topics covered in this book.

Drama: Re-enact any scene in this book, for example, the mutiny of the Georgina and Captain Murray’s response (p. 19).

Multimedia Performances could be based on this and other tales told by Nicholson in this book and series.

FOOD AND PUBLIC HEALTH
The wool and cattle industry were based on the notion that people’s diets were primarily carnivorous. Very little mention is made of the local flora which could also have provided food, and European settlers failed to realise that many local animals might have provided food, as they did to the Aboriginal people. Eg. fish, kangaroo, even goanna!

Activity: Research foods of that time.

Question: What other health issues experienced by early European inhabitants of Australia, did you observe in the reading of this text?

Question: Travelling by ship was very hazardous in the nineteenth century. The book lists (p. 19) the numbers of deaths aboard four ships enroute to Australia between October and November 1852. What were people most likely to have died from?

MATHS
This book suggests a range of simple maths activities which might be explored with students:

See Table (p. 7). By what percentage did the number of sheep in Australia increase between 1800 and 1880?

See Table (p. 14). This presents quite a range of statistics on bullocks, horses and camels. Students might convert a range of figures here into percentages.

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION
1. Read all three titles in this series, and then create a ‘timeline’ marking significant dates in the story of trade in Australia. Discuss one of the landmark events on this timeline in class.

2. In this book, the fact that large areas or paddocks or ‘commons’ were set aside within towns for teamsters, is just one of the fascinating details offered (p. 11). Research the evolution of one of these commons. eg Gundaroo is a surviving town with such a common. [See ‘Welcome to Gundaroo (Graeme Challinor’s Gundaroo pages).’ http://www.gundaroo.info/gundaroo/index.htm]
3. Nicholson calls Australia ‘Britain’s bread basket’ (p. 9). What does this mean? And how true was it?

4. ‘While Australia was selling a wider range of products to the world, most of them were raw materials. We continued to rely on England and the United States for most manufactured items...’ (p. 10) What effect did this have on Australia’s later trade and prosperity?

5. The next and fourth book in this series deals with ‘Steam, Steel and Speed’. What forms of transport (discussed in this third book) did steam and steel displace?

**CONCLUSION**

Each book in this series offers the reader enticing questions to pursue further via research and reading.

**IN-DEPTH RESEARCH TOPICS TO PURSUE:**

1. Read the coverage (p. 17) of the ‘Bullocky’ and the ‘Afghan’ in which facts are outlined and myths are disputed. Choose another topic covered in this book, research it, and write a similar analysis.

2. Read the statement: ’But fire, surprisingly, was the mariner’s worst nightmare.’ (p. 24) Research other incidents on the high seas or in harbour where fire threatened or destroyed ships.

3. Examine the wool industry and how it has evolved from these times until the present day, and what effect it had on Australia’s growth.

4. Maritime trade is a subject which is full of many tangential subjects, such as pirates, shipwrecks, passenger transport, immigration. Ask students to choose any related subject and research it in relation to early trade in Australia.

5. The decline of the wool industry has been caused by a number of factors. Research this topic and deliver a classroom address on the subject.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RELATED TEXTS AND OTHER SOURCES**

**BOOKS**


Wheatley, Nadia *A Banner Bold: The Diary of Rosa Aarons*, Lindfield, NSW, Scholastic, 2000. [This is one of the Scholastic *My Australian Story* series which are fictional accounts of real events in Australia’s history.]

**WEBSITES**

‘Australia’s Maritime World Nautical News.’
http://www.maritimeworld.net/nn.asp?PageNumber=316

Cobb and Co Museum - a campus of the Queensland Museum

The Cobb and Co Heritage Trail
www.cobbandco.net.au/

‘Cobb, Freeman (1830-1878) [Biographical Entry].’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography*
http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030404b.htm

‘The Lambing Flat Rebellion.’

‘The Land and People of Baluchistan.’
http://www.geocities.com/pak_history/baluchistan.html

‘Significance to South Australia.’

‘Tree of Knowledge.’

‘Wade, Abdul (1866-1928+).’ *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition*

‘Welcome to Gundaroo (Graeme Challinor’s Gundaroo pages).’
http://www.gundaroo.info/gundaroo/index.htm

‘The Wool Industry - looking back and forward.’ Cat.no. 1301.0, *Year Book Australia*, 2003. Canberra, ABS.

‘Wool is best.’ An up-to-date guide to the Australian wool industry.
http://www.woolisbest.com

**ABOUT THE WRITERS**

**JOHN NICHOLSON**

John Nicholson is an award-winning author and illustrator, who has produced a number of children’s books for Allen & Unwin. Three of John’s books, *A Home among the Gum Trees, The First Fleet* and *Fishing for Islands*, have been awarded the Children’s Council of Australia’s Eve Pownall Award for Information Books. He was trained as an architect but now writes and illustrates full-time. His books are mostly non-fiction, and he believes that ‘information books’ can be as exciting and adventurous as fiction. John Nicholson’s other publications for children and teenagers include:

*Paper Chase* 1993
*Homemade Houses* 1993
*Gold!* 1994
The Cruellest Place on Earth 1994
The First Fleet 1995
Australian Explorers 1996
Kimberley Warrior 1997
A Home Among the Gum Trees 1997
Who’s Running This Country? 1998
Fishing for Islands 1999
The State of the Planet 2000
Building the Sydney Harbour Bridge 2000
The Mighty Murray 2002
Animal Architects 2003
Australia Locked Up 2006
Songlines and Stone Axes 2007
Cedar, Seals and Whaling Ships 2007

Within NSW, school visits by John Nicholson can be organised through Lateral Learning. Visit http://www.laterallearning.com or email bookings@laterallearning.com.

Within Victoria, school visits can be organised through Booked Out. Visit http://www.bookedout.com.au/ or email bookings@bookedout.com.au

DR ROBYN SHEAHAN-BRIGHT

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and publishes regularly on children’s literature, Australian fiction, and publishing history. She was inaugural director of and is a Life Member of the Queensland Writers Centre, and was co-founder of Jam Roll Press. Her latest publications include Paper Empires: A History of the Book in Australia (1946-2005) (2006) co-edited with Craig Munro, Kookaburra Shells Port Curtis Literature (2006), and Hot Iron Corrugated Sky: 100 Years of Queensland Writing (2002) co-edited with Stuart Glover. She has chapters in several textbooks including Making Books edited by David Carter and Anne Galligan (UQP, 2007) and Crossing the Boundaries edited by Michelle Anstey and Geoff Bull (Pearson Education, 2002). Her PhD thesis traced the development of the Australian children’s publishing industry, and she teaches for Griffith University (Gold Coast) and USQ.