

The Australia Book by Eve Pownall, illustrated by Margaret Senior

About the book

This award-winning history book is highly recommended as an excellent resource for primary school children.

It is a remarkable book because although first published more than half-a-century ago, it is still relevant. It is, moreover, as accessible to children today as it was then. This publication is a facsimile of the 1952 edition. It has not been updated nor has it been altered to fall into line with present day sensibilities. It therefore provides important snapshots of the values and attitudes of the time it was written. The author herself acknowledged that over time perspectives would change. Importantly, then, the book provides students with ample opportunity to reflect on the past.

Even by today's standards the book is unique. It provides a complete history of Australia for primary school children and was written as a single narrative—there are no chapters. It begins with Aborigines and continues chronologically covering all the major events and nation-building developments up to the immediate post-WWII period. The illustrations add colour and life to the narrative.

The Australia Book is a proud and positive history that makes it a wonderful introduction to Australian history for children. The book, furthermore, is a powerful reminder that history is not static—that, in the words of the author ... 'the story goes on...[and] moves and grows with the years.'

Learning exercises

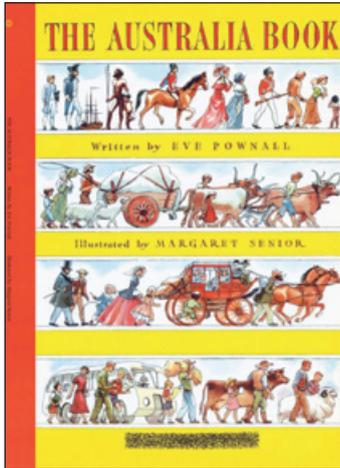
The activities below incorporate Literacy including Drama; Integrated Studies — History, Geography and the Environment; Science; Music and Art

It is important that students read the book in its entirety. There are only 38 pages to read with short paragraphs and lots of illustrations. It is not recommended that the subject matter be broken into themes for the first reading—the aim is for students to get a sense of history unfolding.

Appropriate excursions would compliment the study of this book.

Appropriate films would also further the children's knowledge of aspects of Australian history, for example, *Rabbit Proof Fence* and *Ned Kelly*.

Invite an aboriginal performer to visit the class and tell dreamtime stories or sing and dance or give lessons in spear and boomerang throwing.



Enlist the aid of the librarian. Alert him/her to the kinds of book on Australian history that students may seek out during the course of study.

Introducing the book

Book format

- Who is the author?
- Who is the illustrator?
- When was the book first published?
- What do you notice about the presentation of the information that is different to many other text books? (No contents page, no chapters or headings, no index)
- How does the author draw the reader's attention to something (puts it in capital letters)
- Where is the map located? (last page)

Visual literacy

Look at the illustrations on the front cover. What is some of the subject matter students can expect to find in the book? (Aborigines, arrival of Europeans, soldiers and convicts, pioneer settlers, communications and transportation, farming and agriculture, Australia today)

Oral presentations

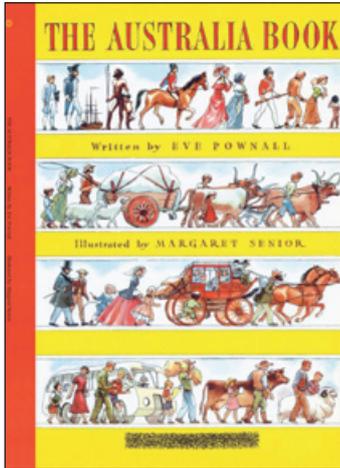
Allocate the topics below. (There are 22 topics to choose from, designed to involve at least 26 students.) Students will need to go beyond the book for information in preparation for their presentations—5 minutes maximum. Some useful websites and books are listed. Encourage students to wear some item of clothing which is in character, and to use props such as maps, photos etc. where appropriate. They must introduce their character and make the time period clear.

The Dreamtime:

You are the Rainbow Serpent! What are indigenous Australians referring to when they talk about the Dreaming or the Dreamtime? What are Dreamtime stories and why are they important to Aborigines? What is your Dreamtime story? What does it mean?

Before the Europeans came

You are a book reviewer. Refer specifically to pp. 6 - 7 of The Australia Book. Make sure class have their books open at those pages. Explain what each illustration says about aboriginal life before the Europeans came. What overall impression do these illustrations give? In your opinion, is this impression entirely correct? Why?



Two early aboriginal responses to the Europeans: (2 students to give presentation)

1. You are Bennelong. Give brief biographical details about yourself. Find a portrait to show the class. How did you respond to the Europeans? What contribution did you make to black/white relations?

2. You are Pemulwuy. Give brief biographical details about yourself. Find a portrait on the net to show class. How did you respond to the coming of the Europeans? What was the end result?

Transit of Venus 1769.

You are Capt. James Cook sent to the southern seas to observe the transit of Venus. What is the transit of Venus and what is its significance to astronomers? How often does it occur? Explain where in the southern seas you observed this phenomenon (use map). What were your sealed instructions, opened after the transit? What happened next?

- *Transit of Venus: the scientific event that led Captain Cook to Australia, Nick Lomb*

The First Fleet:

You are Governor Phillip. It is May 1787 and the First Fleet is about to set sail for New South Wales.

Give a briefing on the following information:

Statistics: number of convicts — male and female, officers, wives, children, marines on board.

What supplies are on board for use in NSW

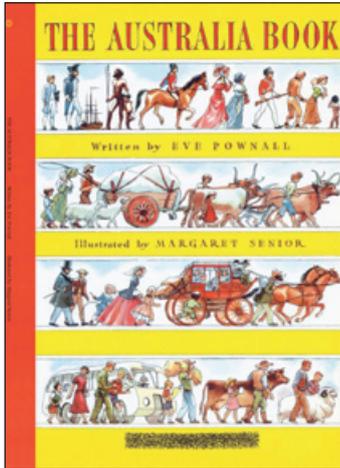
Statistics: <http://www.majormitchell.com.au/htah/htahfirstfleet.html> (a hop through Australian History 1787 First Fleet Statistics – in verse format)

Supplies: <http://home.vicnet/~firstff/list.htm>

Convicts: (select one female and one male student to each give presentations)

You are an 18-year-old convict serving a life sentence in NSW. It is 1789. Unlike some convicts, you can read and write. Write a letter to your parents in London telling them what life is like — food, where you live, clothing, work — if you get paid, any entertainment or leisure activities you take part in, and what your hopes (or fears) are for your future in NSW. Read the letter to the class.

- On the net, google “historic houses trust – a day in the life of a convict”
- <http://www.hht.au/discover/highlights/kids-fact-sheets/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-convict>



Inland exploration

You are the ghost of inland explorers Eyre, Sturt, Leichhardt, Stuart and Burke and Wills. What were the main obstacles faced in early journeys of exploration? What were the successes — use a map as an aid. What happened to Leichhardt, Burke and Wills? What lessons do you think future pioneers and explorers learnt from the tragedies that occurred?

The Squatters

You are a squatter. What does it mean to be a squatter? Who were they? How did squatting come about? Where did they go? What was life like?

Origins of your home state/territory (excl NSW) (2 students to make this presentation)

Briefly outline who were the first Europeans to settle in what was to become your home state/territory, and how the settlement of what was to become the capital city came about. Include any interesting details about these first settlements (in making the presentation, you can decide which historical figure you will be) What is your state or territory's motto, emblem and flower?

Cobb & Co.

You are the American immigrant Freeman Cobb, one of the founders of Cobb and Co. in 1853. Describe the coaches — how were they powered? What impact did Cobb and Co. coaches have on communications and transportation in the colony?

The Eureka Stockade:

You are Peter Lalor. Explain what the gold miners' grievances were and what happened on the Ballarat goldfields in 1854.

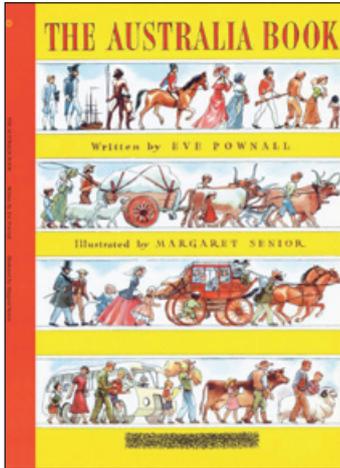
Caroline Chisholm:

Give some brief biographical details about yourself, Explain why you were known as the "immigrants' friend".

Communications – The Overland Telegraph:

You are Charles Todd, engineer, and it is 1872 and the Overland Telegraph between Adelaide and Darwin has just been completed. Explain why the building of the telegraph was regarded as one of the greatest engineering achievements of the nineteenth century and what it meant for the people of Australia.

- <http://www.southaustralianhistory.com.au/overland.htm>
- *The Singing Wire. The Story of the Overland Telegraph* by Eve Pownall (children's edition)



Federation:

You are Sir Edmund Barton, and it is 1901. What is your claim to fame?

What is meant by Federation? Why was Federation necessary? What are its advantages?

Australian icon: the Sydney Harbour Bridge

You are John Bradfield, the chief engineer of the bridge project. Why was the bridge necessary? What specific body of water does it span? Provide some statistics about the bridge, any other interesting information, and give details about the opening ceremony in 1932.

Aviation:

You are pioneering Australian aviator Nancy Bird Walton. Describe your contribution to the aviation industry. Mention other key figures in Australia's aviation history.

Post World War II - The United Nations:

You are a book reviewer. Comment specifically on paragraph 1 p. 43 of *The Australia Book*. First remind students what Pownall said about why the United Nations was established. In your opinion, has the UN been successful in achieving this aim? Give evidence to back up your answer. Second, mention some of the good work the UN does in the world today.

Innovation - plastics:

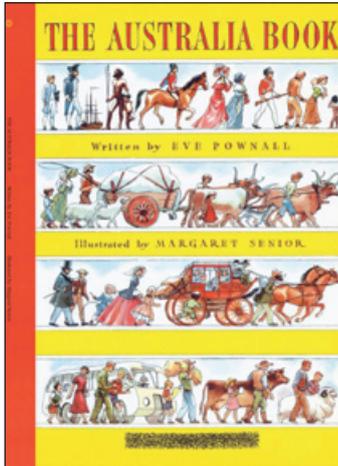
You are an environmentalist. Comment specifically on para 4, p. 43. First, remind students what Pownall said about plastics. Second, talk about what we know today about plastic and its impact on the environment. Suggest ways to lessen the problems plastic can cause.

Migration: (choose migrant students from different parts of the world)

You are a migrant (or your parents are migrants). Explain what country you/they came from, how you/they arrived in Australia, were you/they in a migration camp somewhere else first, if so where, and what were conditions like? (Have a large map of the world on display) Also mention some of the difficulties adjusting to Australian life, as well as what's good about life in Australia.

Australian icon: kangaroos:

You are Skippy! Tell the class something about kangaroos — where they are found in Australia, different species, their habitats, what they eat, the unique birthing process and maturation of the young; the kangaroo industry; problems encountered by kangaroos today and problems encountered by those who live near to them.



Camels

You are a cameleer today at Uluru or Broome. What industry are you most likely to be working in, and what is your job? Over one million camels roam free in Central Australia — how did this come about? Explain why the first camels were brought to Australia and who came with them? What role have camels played in the development of inland Australia? Aside from the industry you work in, name two other Australian industries involving camels?

Irrigation (2 students to share this presentation)

You are primary producers dependant on irrigation. What crops rely on irrigation in Australia? Where specifically does the water for irrigation come from? How is the water shared? What is a major disadvantage of the open water channels? What are the benefits of irrigation to primary producers in Australia? What is the biggest challenge facing farmers using irrigation?

Music and poetry

'Botany Bay' and 'And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda' are available for streaming and downloading on the internet.

Convicts and transportation: Botany Bay

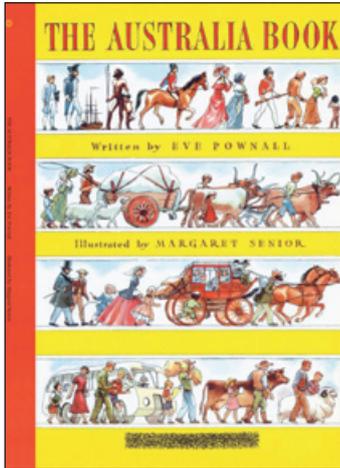
Written by Florian Pascal for the comedy *Little Jack Shepherd*, performed in London in 1885 and Melbourne in 1886

Have class read the lyrics, listen to it, then sing it. It is very easy to sing and the tune should be familiar to some of the students. It's a rollicking kind of tune, rather like a sea shanty.

Discuss the lyrics. Some claim its confident air is said to depict the Australian spirit but is often mistaken as cheekiness, cockiness, even arrogance instead. Does class think the convicts would have really been this confident about the future — after all, it was not written by a convict? However, this poem is written about a time when even a small crime could result in a seven year sentence in NSW as a convict. The poem talks about this in the first verse and finishes in the last verse with a warning to boys and girls (Dookies and Duchesses) not to steal or they'll wind up in Botany Bay. The song is thus a cautionary tale. A swell is person who is well dressed, somewhat flash-looking. The Old Bailey was the London prison and court where convicts were tried. Log on our toes probably refers to being in shackles of some type.

Farewell to Old England forever
Farewell to my old pals as well
Farewell to the well known Old Bailee
Where I once used to be such a swell
Where I once used to be such a swell.

Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ad-di-ty,
Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ay,
Singing too-rall, li-oo-rall, li-ad-di-ty



Oh we are bound for Botany Bay
Oh we are bound for Botany Bay.

There's the captain as is our commandeer,
There's bo'sun and all the ship's crew
There's first and the second class passengers,
Knows what we poor convicts goes through
Knows what we poor convicts goes through.

Repeat chorus: Singing...!

'Taint leaving Old England we cares about,
'Taint 'cos we misspell wot we knows
But becoss all we light finger'd gentry
Hop's around with a log on our toes.
Hop's around with a log on our toes.

Repeat chorus

Oh had I the wings of a turtle-dove,
I'd soar on my pinions so high,
Slap bang to the arms of my Polly love,
And in her sweet presence I'd die
And in her sweet presence I'd die.

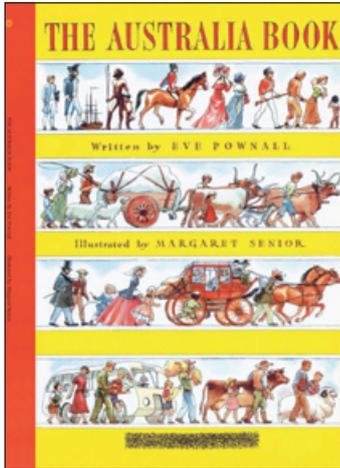
Now all my young Dookies and Duchesses,
Take warning from what I've to say,
Mind all is your own as you touch-es-es,
Or you'll find us in Botany Bay,
Or you'll find us in Botany Bay.

Repeat chorus

War and the ANZACs: And The Band Played Waltzing Matilda .
Words and music by (Scottish immigrant), Eric Bogle (1971)

If unable to locate the music, treat it as a poem.

This song offers many opportunities for discussion. It is about the horrors and futility of war — an anti-war song. Play the song to the students (the Bogle version is by far the best and the most moving and evocative). Make sure they have the lyrics in front of them.. Discuss what it tells them about Gallipoli, war in general and ANZAC Day (it was actually written after Bogle observed an ANZAC Day parade at the height of the Vietnam war protests). How do the words make them feel? The last four lines are from the song *Waltzing Matilda* — what feelings do they engender. Patriotism? Pride in being Australian? Who are the ghosts being referred to in this context?



Now when I was a young man I carried me pack
And I lived the free life of the rover.
From the Murray's green basin to the dusty outback,
Well, I waltzed my Matilda all over.

Then in 1915, my country said, "Son,
It's time you stop ramblin', there's work to be done."
So they gave me a tin hat, and they gave me a gun,
And they marched me away to the war.

And the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
As the ship pulled away from the quay,
And amidst all the cheers, the flag waving, and tears,
We sailed off for Gallipoli.

And how well I remember that terrible day,
How our blood stained the sand and the water;
And of how in that hell that they call Suvla Bay
We were butchered like lambs at the slaughter.

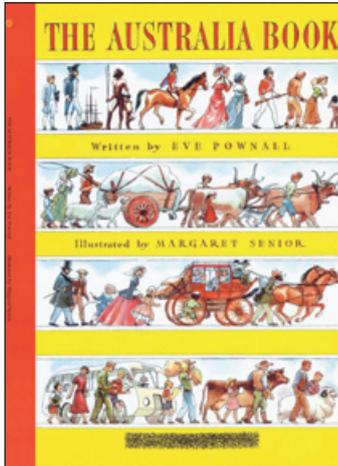
Johnny Turk, he was waitin', he primed himself well;
He showered us with bullets, and he rained us with shell --
And in five minutes flat, he'd blown us all to hell,
Nearly blew us right back to Australia.

But the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
When we stopped to bury our slain,
Well, we buried ours, and the Turks buried theirs,
Then we started all over again.

And those that were left, well, we tried to survive
In that mad world of blood, death and fire.
And for ten weary weeks I kept myself alive
Though around me the corpses piled higher.

Then a big Turkish shell knocked me arse over head,
And when I woke up in me hospital bed
And saw what it had done, well, I wished I was dead --
Never knew there was worse things than dying.

For I'll go no more "Waltzing Matilda,"
All around the green bush far and free --
To hump tents and pegs, a man needs both legs,
No more "Waltzing Matilda" for me.



So they gathered the crippled, the wounded, the maimed,
And they shipped us back home to Australia.
The armless, the legless, the blind, the insane,
Those proud wounded heroes of Suvla.

And as our ship sailed into Circular Quay,
I looked at the place where me legs used to be,
And thanked Christ there was nobody waiting for me,
To grieve, to mourn and to pity.

But the band played "Waltzing Matilda,"
As they carried us down the gangway,
But nobody cheered, they just stood and stared,
Then they turned all their faces away.

And so now every April, I sit on my porch
And I watch the parade pass before me.
And I see my old comrades, how proudly they march,
Reviving old dreams of past glory,

And the old men march slowly, all bones stiff and sore,
They're tired old heroes from a forgotten war
And the young people ask "What are they marching for?"
And I ask meself the same question.

But the band plays "Waltzing Matilda,"
And the old men still answer the call,
But as year follows year, more old men disappear
Someday, no one will march there at all.

Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda.
Who'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me?
And their ghosts may be heard as they march by the billabong,
Who'll come a-Waltzing Matilda with me?

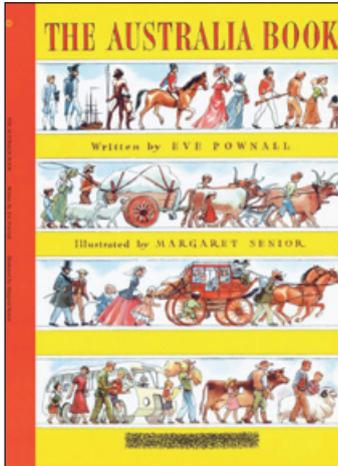
Review of book and feedback.

Class discussion

- What period or episodes of Australia's history did you find most interesting?
- What would you like to know more about?
- Were there any particular individuals or groups that earned your respect?
- Did anything in the book surprise you?
- What have you gained from the reading of the book?

Further studies

Have students complete a project on a topic of their choosing.



About the author

Award-winning author Eve Pownall (1901-1982) did not begin her working life as a writer or historian — her interest in children’s literature developed when she had children of her own. Writing both fiction and non-fiction, her contribution to Australian literature, and historical writing in particular, was outstanding. Her legacy endures not only through her body of work, but through the Children’s Book Council of Australia which she was integral in establishing, and the Eve Pownall Award for Information Books which the Council introduced in 1993

About the illustrator

Margaret Senior (1917-1995) was a celebrated artist who specialized in scientific and Australian natural history illustrations, most notably of wildlife. She also collaborated on a number of children’s books as illustrator. The Margaret Senior Wildlife Illustration Award is presented annually by the University of Newcastle.