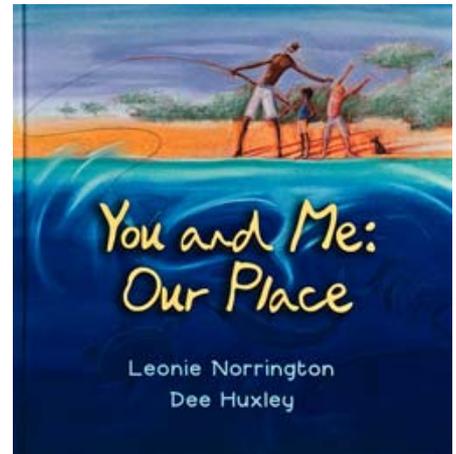


TEACHER'S BOOK NOTES

You and Me: Our Place

Written by Leonie Norrington
Illustrated by Dee Huxley



The Author: Leonie Norrington

Leonie Norrington was born in Darwin, the third of nine children. She grew up at Barunga Aboriginal community, south of Katherine. Leonie says, 'We were looked after by Clare, who "grew us up properly": teaching us bush tucker, hunting, and respect for sacred places and important people. We were real bush kids, speaking Aboriginal English and Kriol fluently'. In the early 1970s Leonie returned to Darwin and high school. She lived with her family on the outskirts of town with lots of other large Catholic, Greek and Aboriginal families, and they 'all hung out together and looked after each other'. Leonie has had many different jobs - she's been a hairdresser, a farmhand, a nurseryperson, and a fruit picker. When she was in her thirties she went back to school to do Year 12 and discovered she could write. She started writing for children when her grandson Sean was born, because she 'wanted to show him that Aboriginal people and white people can and do live together in respect and trust, despite their different cultural traditions'. Currently, Leonie works as a journalist and writer.

The Illustrator: Dee Huxley

Dee Huxley has been illustrating picture books for many years and is now one of the most popular and well-known illustrators in Australia. Dee studied design and craft at the National Art School, East Sydney. After graduating she taught visual arts in secondary schools in Australia and London, and later worked as a graphic designer for television. A freelance illustrator since 1976, her work is displayed in galleries nationally and internationally. Her books, *Mr. Nick's Knitting* and *Rain Dance*, were short-listed for the Children's Book Council of Australia Picture Book of the Year Award. Dee lives in Sydney and teaches illustration and design part-time. She uses a wide range of media and techniques, and changes her style to suit the mood and subject of each picture book.

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Synopsis

You and Me: Our Place is a story about connections between old and young, and between different cultures. Two young boys spend happy days fishing with old Uncle Tobias, and hunting for bush tucker in the sand and mangroves. They seek shelter from the rain and the hot sun with the long grass people. Uncle Tobias tells stories of the olden days, 'when all his family came to fish this place'. These stories connect the boys with the past, when few other people came to their beach. Now, with the encroachment of modern development, 'everyone comes to the beach to walk and talk, or run, or ride'. And while Uncle Tobias prefers to stay in his own world, the boys and their families enjoy gathering on the beach at sunset with everyone, including the 'newcomers'.

Writing Style

You and Me: Our Place appears at first to be a simple narrative about two young boys enjoying a day of fishing, hunting, listening to stories, and playing on the beach. Each page has only one or two sentences describing the boys' day, from a morning of fishing through to sunset when everyone gathers together at the beach. However the underlying story is a complex portrayal of what Leonie Norrington says is, 'Aboriginal people and white people living together in respect and trust, despite their different cultural traditions'. Leonie wants this book to introduce Aboriginal children to literary language (words and pictures) through a story set in their own reality. She says, 'Aboriginal kids like all kids are very happy with their own relatives and friends - even when those relatives are considered by others to live on the margins of society - because they are bonded and all that other human stuff. This book will present that reality in literature'. Leonie says when she told the long grass people (the people who sleep out on foreshore reserves on the outskirts of Darwin) her story they weren't happy that there were so few words, when the stories they told her were so big. But Leonie's few words beautifully capture the essence of the landscape, the lifestyle, the feeling of companionship, and a connection with a past stretching back over thousands of years. The text is rich with lyrical descriptions of everyday events: 'The sand crunches with newness under our feet', poetic images: 'Uncle Tobias sends the silver lure far out to sea to call the fish in', and language which evokes underlying meaning and emotions: 'His basket smells of salt and darkness'; 'Auntie Ruby pulls a hospital towel around her because her dress is torn'. The story concludes with the boys and their families embracing a different kind of companionship - the joy of playing on a beach crowded with people from all walks of life - from the wider community.

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Illustrations

The subject matter for this book was new to Dee Huxley. She says, 'The media and technique (pastels and pencils) was not a problem, I was in my comfort zone there. However the drawing of the characters was challenging. Their features and colour - I needed reference, which is unusual for me... In the end however I was happy with the final illustrations and that I was challenged'. Dee Huxley used pastel and coloured pencil on coloured paper for the illustrations in *You and Me: Our Place*. Each double page spread bleeds to the edge of the page. This technique, and the use of warm earth tones of sienna, ochre and orange, and sparkling sea tones of blue, turquoise and green, highlights the significance of the land and the sea to the people portrayed in the story. The way Dee draws the characters with loose, fluid lines captures their moods - Uncle Tobias relaxed, carefree on his bike; the boys alert and concentrating, ready to catch a fish; Auntie Ruby quietly covering her torn dress with a hospital towel; Old Isaac singing with gusto. Most of the illustrations are broad landscape sweeps, with a horizon line separating changing skies from the land. The characters are depicted dynamically participating in various activities. One picture provides a contrast. The illustration of the boys with the long grass people warming themselves by a glowing fire under the bridge is a tender and intimate depiction of a close knit and accepting community. The endpapers set the scene for the story. The front endpaper depicts a broad expanse of sand and sea, with a road sliding along the bottom of the picture. The significance of the bridge is not revealed until the reader comes to the back endpaper. The bridge not only provides a place for the long grass people to meet, but also connects the age-old beach with the new town. The bridge gives everyone access— from here to there, and back. Everyone - old and new - can share the pleasures of gathering together as one community.

Discussion Points and Activities

- Through her writing Leonie Norrington *wants to show how Aboriginal people and white people can and do live together in respect and trust, despite their different cultural traditions*. Talk about how she achieves this in *You and Me: Our Place*.
- Leonie Norrington says, 'We see Indigenous people all over Australia in parks and open areas. They are usually considered "itinerant" or homeless - people who are on the margins of society - who don't belong'. Central to this story is the portrayal of the long grass people who sleep out on foreshore reserves on the outskirts of Darwin. Find out more about the long grass people, where they live, where they come from and why they choose this lifestyle.

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- Leonie Norrington also says, 'I'm looking at the sameness between all the cultures that make up our Australian society, rather than the differences.' Talk about the sameness between people and cultures as portrayed in *You and Me: Our Place*.
- Indigenous people use all the marine creatures mentioned in *You and Me: Our Place* as food. These are described on the imprint page of the book. Find out more about these sources of food - how they are caught, what is the best way to cook them. Find out about other kinds of bush tucker. Compare this kind of food gathering with how most Australians get their food.
- Uncle Tobias calls the fish in from the sea. How does he do this? What equipment do the boys and Uncle Tobias use to catch fish? Find out more about the traditional way of fishing.
- Talk about going fishing. Do you have any fishing stories? Ask your parents and grandparents for their fishing stories. Share these with each other. Invite parents and grandparents to come and tell their stories.
- Identify the sea creatures Uncle Tobias and the boys are catching. Draw your own pictures of the sea creatures. Make a poster or a frieze with your pictures.
- Draw your own pictures /illustrations using the same materials and technique as Dee Huxley - pastel and coloured pencil on coloured paper. Experiment with the pastels, blending the edges where the land meets the sea. Choose coloured paper to suit the mood of the picture you are drawing. Experiment with loose, fluid lines to draw people, expressing different emotions.
- The literary text is beautifully enriched by descriptive words and phrases. Talk about these, and how they enhance the story, eg 'The bridge catches the water...' , 'flicky prawns', 'From his world...'. Collect these words and phrases and try using them in your own stories.