



What's Your Story?

Written by Rose Giannone

Illustrated by Bern Emmerichs

Berby Publishing, 2013, 40 pp.

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This picture book from Australia is set against the backdrop of the first British settlement of Australia in 1788 and describes the friendship of an orphan boy from England and an Aboriginal girl. Leonard and Milba are mesmerized by the peculiarities of each other's worlds and delight in sharing these worlds with

each other. Leonard is a quiet child who stutters but loves books and drawing. As he wanders around his new world, confused and lonely, he encounters Milba from the Eora tribe who has wandered off to catch a glimpse of the "ghost people". The two strike up a friendship, without words, by drawing stories in the sand, and introduce each other to the animals from each their worlds. Understanding how much Leonard enjoys drawing, Milba shows him cave drawings of her people, establishing another link between them. One day, Milba's tribe decides to move on and she only has time to leave a quick drawing in the sand. The book ends by noting that Leonard grew up to become a teacher, often thinking of Milba, while Milba grew up to be a wise elder in her tribe, wondering if Leonard looks at the same sunsets with his family as she does with hers.

The book opens and closes with an invitation for readers to tell their stories. The author carefully sets the context for history as a collection of stories—not just one story but many stories by many different people. Giannone notes that many of the people who came to Australia were forced to do so because they were convicts but that some had only committed the crime of stealing food because they were hungry and others, like Leonard, were not convicts but sent for other reasons. The ships that came were full of people with many different stories. She also points out that the Aboriginal people had already been in this land for 60,000 years, long before anyone from Europe knew of Australia. With a minimum of words, the author provides a careful historical context that respectfully acknowledges multiple perspectives and stories, but does not tell or hint at the story of the racism and displacement of Aboriginal peoples by European settlers. Emmerichs' illustrations are stunning in their details of Australian animals and landforms and people. They were created on large hand-painted ceramic tiles and each color included on each tile was individually fired and then photographed and overlaid with the author's text. That text often weaves and turns like a gentle wave of water around the illustrations on a page.

Rose Giannone is an Australian author who lives in Melbourne. This is her first children's book and grows out of her love of storytelling, both in traditional oral forms and in modern film. Bern Emmerichs is a highly celebrated artist in Australia with many works in galleries and collections. She is known for her work which explores historical narratives related to the

first European settlements of Australia. Both the author and illustrator have a strong interest in this historical time period and engaged in extensive research. Both are from European backgrounds and so foreground Leonard's perspective throughout the book. Even though they are careful to include Milba's perspective, Leonard's perspective is given the most weight and always comes first.

This book should be balanced with other picture books that highlight Aboriginal voices and perspectives, such as *When We Go Walkabout* by Rhoda and Alfred Lalara (Allen & Unwin, 2014), in both English and Anindilyakwa, *When I Was Little Like You* by Mary Malbunka (Allen & Unwin, 2005), *You and Me: Our Place* by Leonie Norrington (Working Title, 2007). The Aboriginal tradition of telling stories through art, such as cave paintings, is another connection that could be explored through books, such as *What is Aboriginal Art?* By Margo Birnberg (J. B. Publishing, 2012) and *Australian Aboriginal Paintings* by Jennifer Isaacs (New Holland Australia, 2002).

Other possible pairings include stories of immigration, such as *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (Scholastic, 2007), which is based on stories of Malaysian immigrants to Australia and *Ziba Came on a Boat* by Liz Lofthouse (Kane/Miller, 2007), the story of an Afghan child and her family fleeing across the ocean on a small boat to Australia. These stories can be told alongside newspaper articles about the current treatment of refugees in Australia through detainment in prison camps in Indonesia or on islands off the coast of Australia. *Home and Away* by John Marsden and Matt Ottley (Lothian, 2008) is a powerful indictment of the destruction of families in these detainment centers.

The book ends with an invitation for children to tell their stories and so can be used to invite children to research their own family histories, both distant and close, in order to explore how those histories have shaped their identities and that of the places in which they live. Each classroom contains many stories and histories and sharing those stories can be one step to understanding the complexity and diversity of stories that make up families, communities, and nations.

Note: Australian books not available in the U.S. can be ordered through Austral Ed (<https://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/review/reviewvolumevii1/14/www.australed.iinet.net.au>).

Kathy G. Short, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

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