



Finding My Culture

Educator Notes



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and Suzie Johnson
Illustrated by Thomas Readett

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Recommended for: ages 3-6
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These educator notes were created in collaboration with Naomi Hicks

Plot Summary

What happens when the way you see yourself isn't the way the world sees you?

Based on a true story, *Finding My Culture* follows one child's journey to connect with their identity and embrace the culture they had never known.

Rooted in the strength of community and Country, this story explores what it feels like to grow up wrestling with a sense of self, feeling disconnected from Indigenous roots and uncertain of one's place within the community. Yet with every lesson learned and every hand extended in support, the path back to culture becomes clearer. *Finding My Culture* echoes with resilience and connection, reminding us that healing becomes possible when we truly see ourselves and each other for who we are.

Themes

- Family
- Culture and connection to Country
- Self-discovery

Rich and interesting words: surrounding, respecting, memory, gazing

Key Curriculum Learning Areas

Early Years Learning Framework:

Outcome 1 - Children have a strong sense of identity

The overarching story woven throughout multiple examples of this book (*flying our flag, hearing our stories, in our songs, etc.*) enable children to see their culture in the environment around them. When children see their own culture and identity represented positively in stories and media, it helps them to develop knowledgeable confident self-identities and a positive sense of self-worth. This powerful story can be used to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to share their own stories and connect to their own sense of identity.

Furthermore, this provides opportunities for all children to develop knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the context of their environment and community.

Outcome 2 - Children are connected with and contribute to their world

Nature and being on Country are two themes explored deeply throughout this story. Children’s connectedness and different ways of belonging with people, Country and communities helps them to learn ways of being which reflect the values, traditions and practices of their families and communities. Over time this learning transforms the ways they interact with others.

Educators can work to build trusting relationships with families, Elders and communities so that histories, stories, languages, as well as the local knowledge of how the Traditional Owners cared for and sustained the land and environment, are shared with all children.

Australian Curriculum

Learning Area: English

Foundation

<p>Language: Language for interacting with others</p>	<p>Explore how language is used differently at home and school depending on the relationships between people (AC9EFLA01)</p>
<p>Language: Language for expressing and developing ideas</p>	<p>Explore the contribution of image and words to meaning in stories and informative text (AC9EFLE07)</p>
<p>Literature: Literature and contexts</p>	<p>Share ideas about stories, poems and images in literature, reflecting on experiences that are similar or different to their own by engaging with texts by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors and illustrators (AC9EFLE01)</p>
<p>Literacy: Phonic and Word Knowledge</p>	<p>Recognise and generate rhyming words, alliteration patterns, syllables and sounds (phonemes) in spoken words (phonological awareness) (AC9EFLY09)</p>

Conversation Starters

Before Reading

- Take time to understand the story as educators, and to read the information on the author and illustrator's lived experience story.
- If you have Aboriginal children that you are educating, make effort to talk to their parents and carers, to see what their Aboriginal connections are, and look up those areas to educate yourself. You may have an Aboriginal Support Worker that could also help.
- For children who aren't Aboriginal, they can explore their own 'finding my culture' story through their world-wide connections. Include parents and carers to support this journey. Educators can connect with parents/carers to ask for knowledge on their family connections, to help build the understanding of cultures.
- Create an activity that allows all children to express themselves within their cultures and display it in the room. For example, "My name is Naomi and I'm proud to be Aboriginal/German," – children can draw pictures, bring photos or any items from their cultural background.

While Reading

- Most pages in this book end with the phrase, "it's surrounding me." Take a moment to explain the word *surrounding*, and encourage children to join in on the repeated phrase. Having children join in on repeated phrases helps them see themselves as readers and feel like they are 'reading' with you.
- "In the fire..." you may like to discuss the coolamon the child is holding in the illustration. A coolamon (or guleman) is a multi-purpose shallow vessel, similar in shape to a canoe. It is also used for carrying babies, food and conducting smoking ceremonies.
- Giving children context for illustrations and text allows them to give meaning to the story and understand it on a deeper level.
- "In my soul lies the key" – you may like to take a moment to discuss how the reference to 'my soul' is not a literal object – there is not an actual key inside the child's body – but how it is speaking to a more figurative phrase: the metaphorical key connecting the child to their culture.



After Reading

- Explore activities that connect children with the feeling of embracing parts of who they are. For example, if they love singing and dancing, discuss how it makes them feel. You may then like to have a little dance, and talk about how they feel afterwards.
- Children may like to draw their favourite environment that makes their soul strong, happy and powerful.
- Nature and Country are strong themes throughout the book. Discuss the illustrations of nature with children, and the feelings that nature can evoke.
- For example:
 - Have you been to the beach?
 - Have you seen rain and lightning, or heard thunder?
 - How did you feel?
 - What do you like about rain? What don't you like?
 - You may like to explore nature and your own environment. Take children outside to see the sky, feel the wind blow, and ask what they *notice* about their surroundings.
 - Explore different types of trees with children – not only with a scientific exploration but also exploring our emotional connection with nature. Look at the trees, hug the trees – ask children how it feels to be in the shade, and discuss how trees provide oxygen for us to live. You may like to spend time planting a tree, or show children the difference between a newly planted sapling and a big, established tree.

FURTHER ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Listen to *I Am Me*, a heartwarming and empowering song that celebrates the rights and individuality of children. It was co-created by Children's Rights Queensland, Aunty Sharron mirii Bell, and Queensland Children. You can find the music video, as well as other accompanying resources, here: childrensrights.org.au

Mother Earth is a song to connect with nature all around. Listen to this and other free musical resources on Spirit In Unity's website: spiritinunity.com.au

'Painting from memory' – explore the word 'memory' with children. What are some of their favourite memories? Draw or paint a picture of their special memories. This may be a special day or event, or perhaps a loved one or family pet that they share many memories with.

Check out the activities on our website littlebookpress.com.au

About the Authors

Suzie Johnson is an author, educator and advocate based in South Australia. She has built her career around a deep love of literature, English and drama. Books fill both her classroom and her home, shaping the way she teaches, writes and connects with young readers. Suzie is an active member of RWA (Romance Writers of Australia), RWNZ (Romance Writers of New Zealand) and SARA (South Australian Romance Authors).

Scott Bromley Johnson is a proud Adnyamathanha man with a passion for storytelling. As a child, books sparked his imagination for curiosity; though, like many, as he got older, life's distractions pulled him away from reading for a time. Becoming a father reignited that spark, inspiring a renewed passion for stories and their power to connect. Now, Scott is dedicated to sharing tales that celebrate culture, adventure and the joy of reading with the next generation.

About the Illustrator

Thomas Readett is a renowned multi-disciplinary artist and a Ngarrindjeri man, born and raised on Kurna Country. His work spans drawing, painting, video, music, advocacy and education. Blending a street-art sensibility with classical training, Thomas creates deeply expressive works that explore themes of love, grief, nature and identity. A graduate of the Adelaide Central School of Art, his work has featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions, as well as major public commissions. *Finding My Culture* marks his debut in children's illustration.

About these Educator Notes

Naomi Hicks is a deeply spiritual Traditional Owner with ancestral ties spanning South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and New South Wales, as well as bloodlines connected to 8 global communities. She speaks and sings from the heart, delivering profound personal and universal messages inspired by her Ancestors and departed family members.

In her commitment to honouring the land and its people, Naomi has crafted a unique **Universal Welcome to Country** ceremony to acknowledge and celebrate all who live and gather on Traditional Land.

