

## These notes are for:

- Primary through to secondary

## Key Learning Areas:

- English
- HSIE/SOSE
- Science & Technology
- Maths
- Art

## Example of:

- Picture Book
- Historical Fiction
- Timeline Mapping
- Illustration & Design

## Experience of:

- Connection with the Land
- Cultural Diversity
- Aboriginal History
- Post-settlement History
- Visual Literacy

## Values addressed:

- A Sense of Identity
- Respect for the Environment
- Friendship Across Cultures
- Belonging
- Social Justice

## Themes:

- Indigenous Studies
- Australian History
- Australian Environment
- Place and Space
- Time, Continuity and Change
- Culture and Identity
- Wars and Depressions

\*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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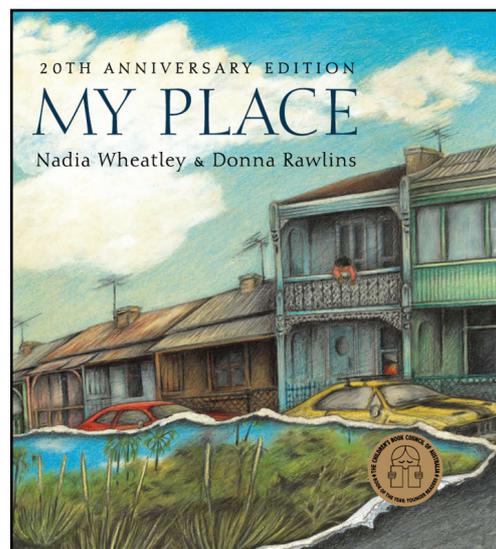
## My Place - Overview

### My Place

Written by Nadia Wheatley  
 Illustrated by Donna Rawlins

*My Place* (hardback)  
 ISBN: 9781921150708  
 ARRP: \$29.95, NZRRP: \$35.99  
 No. of Pages: 48  
 August 2008

*My Place* (paperback)  
 ISBN: 9781921150654  
 ARRP: \$19.95, NZRRP: \$27.99  
 No. of Pages: 48  
 August 2008



## Outline:

In print for twenty years, *My Place* has been republished by Walker Books in a special 20th Anniversary Edition. With a timeline which brings the history up to 2008, and is now a TV series aired on the ABC.

*My Place* traces the history of one small part of Australia and the people who have lived there, from the Dreaming until the present day. As time folds rhythmically backwards, children describe their homes, their families, their pets, and their special celebrations. The constant sources of renewal in the landscape are the big tree and the creek (or canal).

Since its first publication, *My Place* has been a favourite book in many Australian homes and schools. Young people across the country have been inspired by the book to write and illustrate their own *My Place* stories.

## Author/Illustrator Information:

**Nadia Wheatley** began writing full-time in 1976, after completing postgraduate work in Australian history. She writes for adults as well as for children and her published work includes fiction, history, biography and picture books. Nadia's work reflects a commitment to multiculturalism, social justice and the preservation of the natural environment and has been recognised with numerous awards. Over a number of years she worked as a consultant at the school at Papunya, an Aboriginal community in the Western Desert.

**Donna Rawlins** is an illustrator, book designer and teacher who has specialised in making books for children for most of her working life. She has won many awards for her work and in 2003 was the recipient of the prestigious Lady Cutler Award, presented by the Children's Book Council of New South Wales, for her outstanding contribution to the children's book industry.

## How to use these notes:

These notes were prepared by Nadia Wheatley.

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

## Frequently asked questions:

### To Nadia: Where did you get the idea for *My Place*?

I usually get my idea for stories from place. Back in about 1980, I used to live near the Sydney suburb of St Peters, and on Sunday mornings I sometimes took my dog for a walk around the suburb's empty streets and deserted brickpits, and along the wasteland beside a filthy canal. When I realised that the water in the canal would once have been a creek, I started to imagine Aboriginal people living beside the fresh water for thousands and thousands of years.

Some time went by in my own life. Then one night, as I sat doodling little maps just for fun, I found myself drawing the map that you can find on the first page of *My Place*, and writing the opening words that Laura says. Minutes later, I was writing the words that are now on the last page of the book and drawing a picture of a girl sitting up in a tree. At that point, I realised that my idea had turned into a story. Four days later, I sent my rough drafts to Donna ...

### To Donna: How did you go about illustrating *My Place*?

I came to designing and illustrating picture books in collaboration with a close friend, Morag Loh, who was a well-known and respected historian. While working on these projects I became progressively fascinated with history, and particularly with the stories of everyday people. This was something Nadia, with her background in history, shared with me.

My work in educational publishing had required a great deal of research which I enjoyed. I spent a lot of time in libraries. That was lucky, of course, because *My Place* would need a lot of it. The text and images were meticulously planned. After all of the initial research which we often did together, Nadia and I spent many hundreds, perhaps thousands of hours discussing every detail of the text and images. The pictures I did in coloured pencil on tinted paper which gave them a feeling of warmth.

## Using these notes – Preliminary preparation for teachers:

In order to connect these learning experiences in an enriching and holistic way, we recommend:

1. On the wall of the classroom or a nearby corridor, make a big timeline. (See Diagram 1 at the end of these notes.) Although your line will be straight, you can use as your model the timeline from the Walker Books 20th Anniversary Edition of *My Place*. A number of the following activities can be written or pasted onto it.

2. In regard to some of the activities below, invite students each to 'adopt' a character and concentrate on her or his family and historical period. Students can present their research or thoughts about their characters to the class.

Begin with the 20 main characters for the decades. If there are more than 20 students in the class, use secondary characters such as: Bereewan (1788); Maryann (1828); Wong Ga Leck (1858); Amy (1858); Wesley & Charles (1888); Tommy Müller (1898); Eddie (1908); Kath (1928); Thommo (1938); Maroula (1958).

Write each name and date on a card and put it in a box. Let students pick out their characters at random.

## Before Reading *My Place*:

- Look closely at the front cover and discuss:

Why do you think there might be a picture of bush under the layer of houses? Was there once bush beneath your school and house? Is there still any bushland near your home or school? Are there any native plants in the schoolyard or on the nature strip?

- What is the flag on the window of the blue house? Do you know what the three colours represent?
- Do you know the name of the Aboriginal people whose traditional land your school is on? If you don't know, can you find out?
- Look at the timeline in the Walker Books 20th Anniversary Edition of *My Place* and discuss:

In the top left-hand corner, why does the line curl back in a spiral? Where does the time go? What two events are represented in the timeline as happening in 2008?

## First Reading of *My Place*:

- Orientation:

Look at the four text blocks on every spread (double page). What are the four subjects they always cover (home and family, community and environment, pets, celebrations)?

What are the two elements of the landscape which you find in every map? (Hint: one is green and the other is blue.) What do you think they might symbolise?

- Get to know the characters:

*My Place* contains stories about twenty main characters and their families, as well as lots of secondary characters. As you read the book for the first time, add the names of the main characters onto the timeline. You could add a drawing of each character as well.

## Belonging – My Place, My Community, My Family and Myself

### 1. Understanding the *My Place* stories

- As you read through *My Place*, think about:  
People belonging to each other.  
People belonging to the place where they live.
- Between 1788 and 1988 there are at least three significant changes to the house that is home to the *My Place* families. Discuss the changes and do a drawing of the different homes. Stick an example of each onto the classroom timeline at the appropriate date.
- How do the families change? Onto your classroom timeline, mark where each new dynasty appears. What is that family's country of origin? Be sure to look for the families in the maps as well as in the written text.
- Look at one of the characters who lives through a number of decades (eg Sam; Sarah; John Owen; Minna Müller; Bridie; Michaelis).  
How do their lives develop as they grow up? How do you think your life might develop as you grow up? Write a paragraph describing what you think you will be doing in ten years and twenty years.
- 'Adopt' a character, then make a note and drawing about their family's pet. Attach it to the classroom timeline. How do the pets make the characters feel good?
- 'Adopt' a character, then make a note and drawing about their family's celebration. What is important about commemorating things such as festivals and birthdays, and even sad things such as someone dying?
- 'Adopt' a character, then make a note about what they do in the big tree. Add to the classroom timeline.
- Carefully reading the maps as well as the written text of *My Place*, find examples of how friends and neighbours help each other. Discuss how you help your friends and neighbours (and vice versa).
- What things in the story of *My Place* don't change? (Hint: they might be things you can't see, such as friendship and hope.) Write a poem about one of these things.

### 2. Make your own *My Place* story-chart

- See Diagram 2 at end of these notes.  
Using the maps in *My Place* as a model, draw a map of the neighbourhood around your home on a circle of paper the size of a dinner plate.  
On separate small pieces of paper, write a short paragraph to describe: your family; your pet (or a favourite book or toy); a special place where you like to be; something which you celebrate with your family (eg Eid; Christmas; birthday; Mother's Day; Grand Final Day).
- Look at how Donna Rawlins has laid out the text blocks and pictures and maps on each spread of *My Place*. It is important to work out where the words go before you draw the pictures. Lay out your story-chart with your map and pieces of writing, and fill up the spaces with drawings or photos of yourself and your family.
- Use your story-chart to tell your story to the rest of the class.
- Using your story-chart as a starting point, paint a portrait or write a description of someone who lives in your neighbourhood. (It might be a friend your own age, or someone very old.)
- Describe what is special about your neighbourhood or community. Are you or your family in any local community groups (eg for sport; worship; recreation)?
- Write a poem about the place where you live.

### 3. Make a story-chart for somebody else

- Talk to a member of your family from another generation (eg parent; grandparent; aunt). Ask them to draw a simple map of where their home was when they were your age. Ask them to describe their family. Make a *My Place* story-chart for them as well. Do they have photos which you could photocopy or scan? Tell their story to the class.
- Using the book as a starting point, invent a character and write and illustrate a *My Place* story for one of the following decades: 2008; 2028; 2108.
- Using the book as a starting point write the stories of the following pets: Gully 1988; Paul 1968; Bessie 1938; Gert 1918; Ned 1898; Squarker 1888; Gretchen 1868; Mischief 1848; Wilhemina 1828; Daisy 1818; Pokey 1808.

## Connecting with the Land, Environment and History

### 1. Understanding country and history in *My Place*

- Starting at the back of the book, read through *My Place*, tracking the changes to the environment over time. Make notes or small drawings into your classroom timeline to show:

What happens to the water in the creek? What causes the water to change? What happens to the air quality? What causes the air quality to change?

- List six national and international events which you can find in *My Place* (eg wars, depressions, waves of immigration, changes to law). Add to your timeline.
- In the *My Place* text and maps, look for various modes of transport (including feet). Draw pictures and attach to your classroom timeline.
- 'Adopt' a character. Research the clothing of his or her era. Illustrate and add to the classroom timeline.

- 'Adopt' a character, then make a note about how her or his family get food, or support themselves to buy food. What occupations do the characters' parents follow? Do the children have any chores or jobs?

- Using the maps, look at the shops and the farms over time. Are there changes to the food that people eat? List some foods eaten in the following decades: 1788; 1808; 1858; 1928; 1958; 1978. How do they compare with the food that you eat?

- In small groups plan a menu for the family celebrations in the following decades: 1978; 1948; 1938; 1918; 1888; 1868; 1858; 1838; 1828; 1808.

- Compare the way of life of Barangaroo's family with that of Laura's family. Make a list showing the things that change and the things that stay the same.

### 2. Understanding your own country and history

- Display a large map of your local area on the classroom wall. Mark the position of school, and other public places eg: library; town hall; community centres; sports fields; places of worship etc.
- Find your place from space. Look up Google maps to find your school and home – [maps.google.com.au](http://maps.google.com.au)
- As a class, go for a walk around the nearby area. Be aware of the places where the land slopes downhill. This shows how the water flows when it rains. Are there any creeks or other watercourses? If not, can you tell where the creeks once ran? (Clue: they may now be hidden underground in stormwater drains.)

- Make an appointment to visit your local library at a time convenient for the local history librarian, and incorporate this into your walk. Ask the librarian to show you old maps and aerial photographs of your area, and also photos from the local studies collection. Try to find old creeks and watercourses. If possible, make photocopies to display in your classroom.

- Back in the classroom discuss different types of water – fresh and salt. Where does the fresh water in your area come from? Is there any salt water as well? On the current map of your area, mark where there is now fresh water, or where the fresh water was in the past. What can you do to conserve water?

### 3. Develop an understanding of how Aboriginal people lived in your area

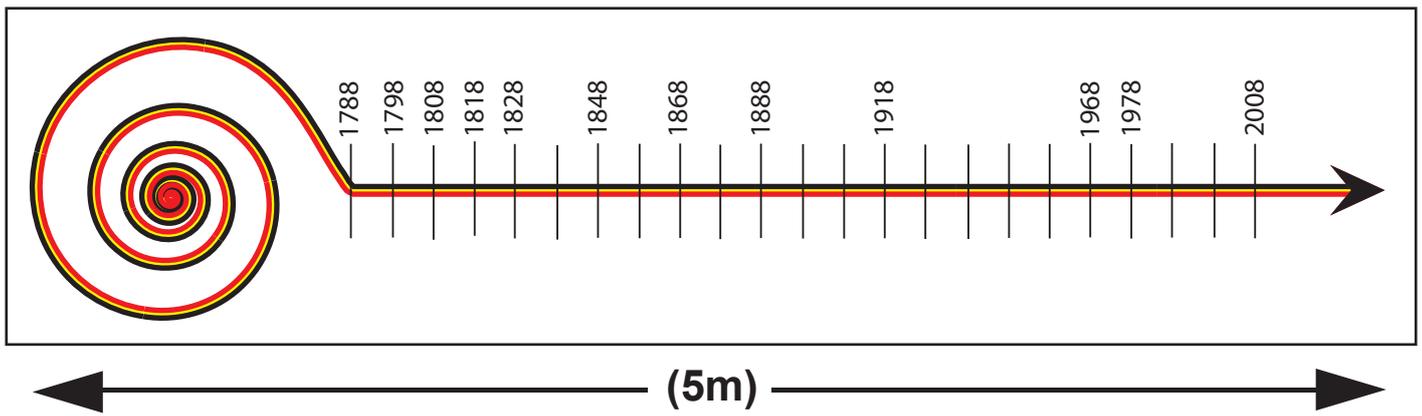
- From your mapping of local sources of fresh water, discuss where Aboriginal people may traditionally have camped in your area. Talk about the seasons. Might different camp sites have been used in the hot time and the wet time?
- Make a list of food that Aboriginal people would have eaten in your area (eg fish; possums; kangaroo; berries; roots and yams; fruit). Your local librarian may be able to help you with books. You don't have to be specific about names.
- In what different ways was fire used? Write a poem about the different uses of fire.
- What games did children play in the bush? Check the reading list for a helpful website.

- Find out about different jobs that women and men had in regard to food gathering and hunting in traditional times. What food was got by mothers and children? What food was got by fathers and young men?

- Looking at the spiral of time in the timeline at the front of the Walker Books 20th Anniversary Edition, discuss how long Aboriginal people have been living in Australia. Be mindful that this is a spiritual as well as a historical question. Some Indigenous people see their ancestry as going back to Creation. Some of the books on the reading list can help you understand this. The archaeological record goes back at least 50,000 years, compared with 220 years since European settlement. To get a sense of this, make a timeline of Aboriginal history in your playground. (See Diagram 3.) Walk the distance. Feel the difference!



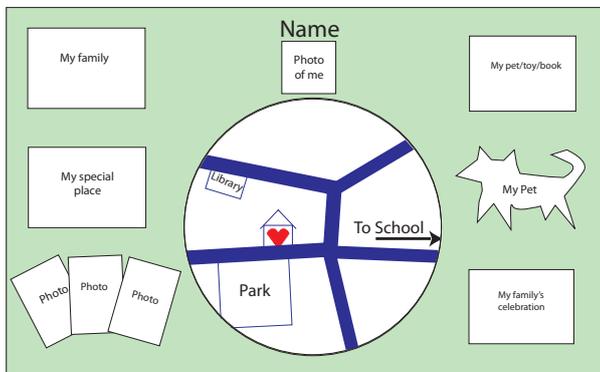
Diagram 1



If 5 metres allow 1 metre for the spiral and about 170mm for each space.

**To make a timeline on the wall:** Simply cut a length from a roll of paper to fit your wall. Approximately 4-5 metres is recommended. With a thick texta draw a spiral at the beginning to represent time going back to the Dreaming. (Or use red, black and yellow textas, to represent the Aboriginal flag.) Then along a straight line, mark 23 points, with roughly equal spaces in between. Write numbers to represent the decades from 1788 until now.

Diagram 2



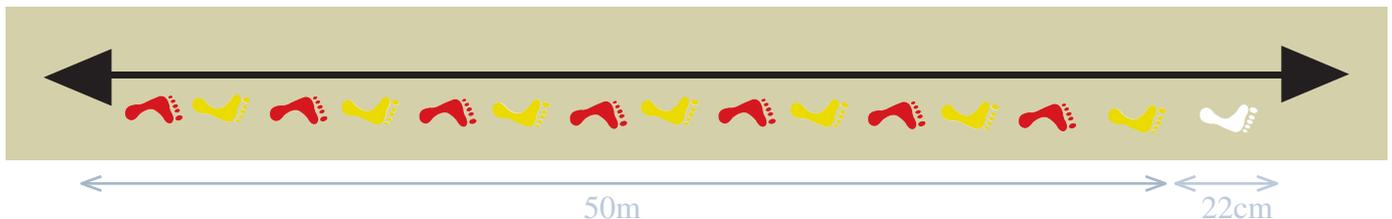
**To make a My Place story-chart:**

You will need a piece of A2-size cardboard.

First cut a circle of paper the size of a dinner plate. Put your home at the centre, and then map the neighbourhood around your home. Only put in the things that are important to you. Don't worry about the scale. Use symbols, shading and colour. If your school is too far away to fit in the map, draw an arrow to show which way you go to school. Write a few sentences directly into the map, describing how you feel about your place, where you play sport, where your friends live etc.

Put your name and a photo at the top of your chart and place your map at the centre. Arrange your written descriptions around it. Add photos or drawings of you and your family.

Diagram 3



**To make a timeline of Aboriginal history in the playground:** For this you need chalk and a builder's tape measure or ruler. Taking turns with the tape measure, mark off 50 lengths of one metre in chalk on the asphalt, to represent 50,000 years in which Aboriginal people have looked after the land. Then keeping in ratio, mark 22 cm to represent the time since Europeans settled on the continent.

Draw around your feet with red or yellow chalk along the 50 metre stretch, then draw one foot in white for the last 200 years. Invite another class out to look at the timeline, and explain it to them.

## Further Reading & Research

- Maisie Barlow, *Jirrbal Rainforest Dreamtime Stories*, Magabala Books
- Gracie Green et al, *Tjarany Roughtail*, Magabala Books
- Pamela Lofts, *Warnayarra the Rainbow Snake*, Scholastic (or any Dreaming stories compiled by Pamela Lofts)
- Percy Trezise, *Land of the Brolga People*, Angus & Robertson (or any Dreaming stories by P. Trezise & D. Roughsey)
- Papunya School Book of Country and History*, Allen & Unwin
- Mary Malbunka, *When I was Little, Like You*, Allen & Unwin
- Nadia Wheatley and Ken Searle, *Going Bush*, Allen & Unwin

Indigenous Traditional Games: [www.ausport.gov.au/participating/all/indigenous/get\\_involved/games](http://www.ausport.gov.au/participating/all/indigenous/get_involved/games)  
 Australian Museum Online: [www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm](http://www.dreamtime.net.au/dreaming/storylist.htm)  
 Google Maps: [maps.google.com.au](http://maps.google.com.au)