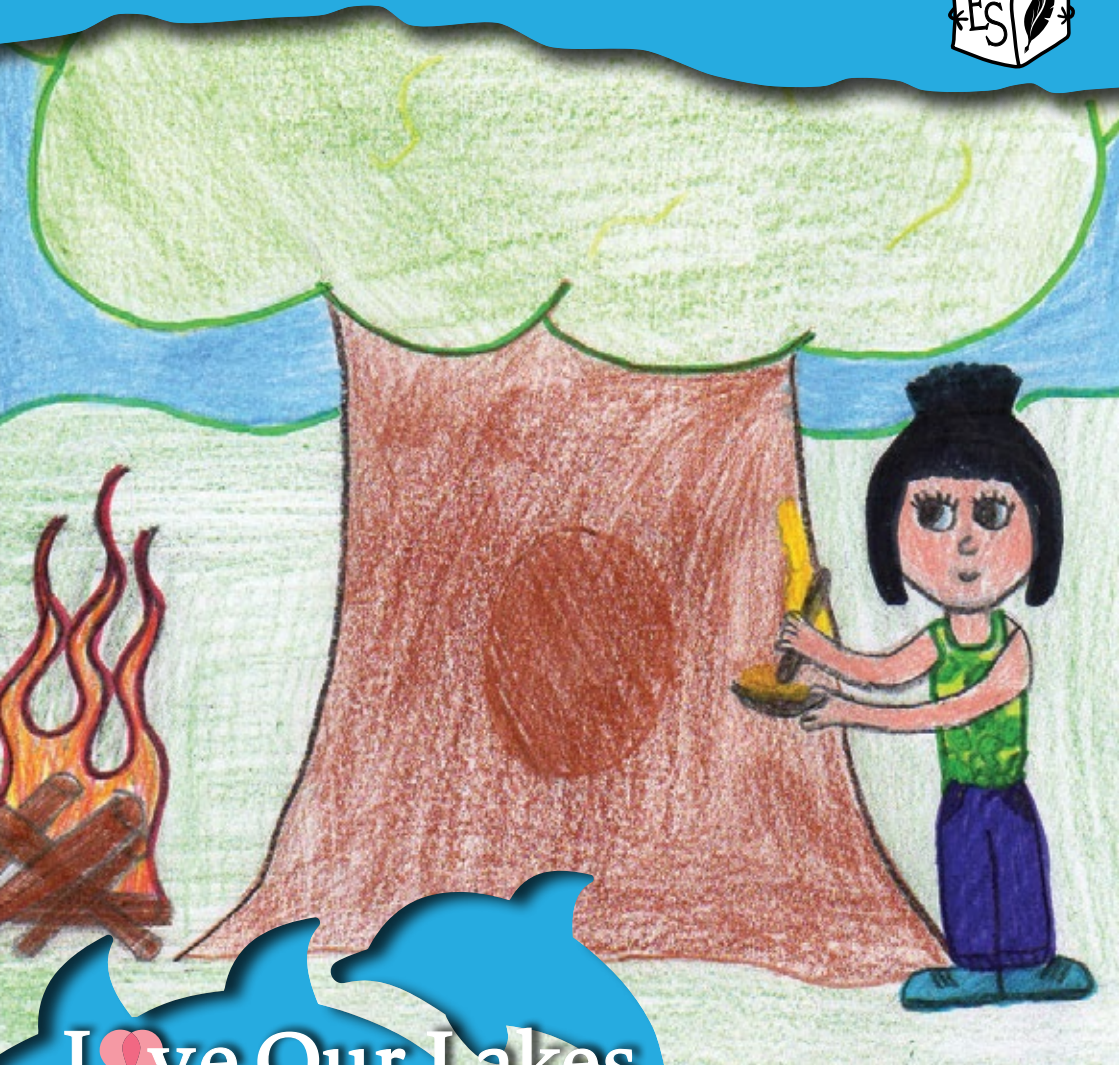


Celebrating Culture with Cassie

Year 5/6

Briagolong Primary School



Love Our Lakes

Enviro-Stories

This book has been published as part of the Enviro-Stories Education Program. Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

Inspiring Local Literacy

www.envirostories.com.au



Celebrating Culture with Cassie

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Briagolong Primary School would like to pay their respects and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this school is built, and also pay respect to Elders both past and present.



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At Briagolong Primary School, we recognise the importance of learning about Aboriginal culture. We are very lucky to have someone local who can visit our school and share her knowledge.

Cassie Leatham is an Aboriginal artist who we have nicknamed "the cultural rock star!" This is because she has thundered cultural knowledge through the minds of young Aussies all over Australia.

Cassie is descended from the Taungurung / Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. She was born in, and is a community member of, Gunaikurnai country.

The Gunaikurnai people are the traditional custodians of the Gippsland Lakes area.



Cassie is a wildlife enthusiast. She loves to teach us about the local environment and all of the amazing native animals found in the Gippsland Lakes area.

Around Briagolong, we have loads of interesting animals, including kangaroos, lizards, echidnas, possums, wombats, koalas, snakes, emus and lots of other types of birds. The native animals are very important to the local Gunaikurnai people as they provide them with food and other resources.





Cassie uses traditional skills to harvest plants and animals for tools, food and her amazing artwork. She doesn't just go and kill native animals, because that is illegal, so she finds animals that have been hit or run over by a car (road kill) and harvests them.

Cassie makes a lot of her art using dead animals from road kill. She uses every part of the animal's body that she can, for all different purposes.

She eats the meat from the animals (if they are fresh) and makes artwork and clothing from the skins. She uses the teeth and bone from the animals for making tools, knives, needles or decorating things.





One of the awesome things Cassie makes is possum and kangaroo skin cloaks and blankets. To make the blankets, she will tan the skins to preserve them and then brand or burn an artwork into it. The art on the blankets tell Aboriginal stories.

Cassie wears the skins as part of her clothing. They can be worn in both winter and summer. On cold days you wear the fur on the inside to keep you warm, and on hot days you wear the skin on the inside to keep you cool.



Some of Cassie's favourite things to use are Echidna spines and Emu feathers.

Echidna spines can be used as decorations to make beautiful jewellery artefacts like earrings. They can also be used as needles, or to make the points of spears.

Emu feathers are pretty and fluffy, so they are great for decorating. Cassie has made earrings, necklaces and even a full skirt out of Emu feathers.

Cassie taught our school about some of the things Aboriginal people make from tree bark. The bark is cut off of trees to make shields, coffins, canoes, shelters and coolamons (plates).

If you see a large cut on a tree around the Gippsland Lakes, it might have been used for a canoe or something else. The idea is to be very careful not to kill the tree when taking the bark. The tree will heal itself over time, but even hundreds of years later you can still see the scar.

These trees are known as *scarred trees*.



Cassie doesn't use plates in her house, but instead eats her food off a coolamon. A coolamon is a sort of plate that is cut out of the bark of a tree.

We went to Marlay Point for a sensational cultural day with Cassie and Greening Australia. Cassie taught us about some outstanding bushtucker. We ate yummy toffee that she made herself and enjoyed some delicious bread that you dip in homemade tomato sauce.

Cassie even showed us her coolamons and the cuts in the bark of the trees where she harvested them. Amazingly, they were already healing over.



Cassie tries to live as sustainably, and traditionally, as she can. Using animals and plants, she can make delicious food with her knowledge. She harvests the local native plants, fish, eels and the fresh road kill she finds for her bushtucker.

Cassie has her own bush foods brand that she sells at the local markets. She makes super healthy food such as cooking sap from trees, homemade jam, toffee and coconut shreds. It is not just super healthy, but it is also super yummy!



Cassie is a very creative local lady who is also a master of traditional weaving. She uses reeds, bark and other parts of plants to make baskets, eel traps and other ornaments. She even made a turtle and a fish that were woven from reeds.

Cassie is so skilled that she also runs workshops on weaving throughout the community.





Dreaming stories are a very important part of Aboriginal culture. They carry important messages about traditional lore, looking after country, looking after each other and creation stories of how people and the landscape were formed.

Cassie told us a story about the "The Den of Nargun", which is a cave located not too far from Briagolong. According to the Gunaikurnai Dreamings, this is a special women's site. It is told that this cave is inhabited by a half-stone, humanoid called the Nargun. Those who enter and disrespect the cave (especially boys) are cursed with bad luck that would eventually kill them.



Cassie is a 'deadly' Aboriginal artist! In fact, she is so good that she has won many awards for her art.

When Cassie came to our school, she showed us her snake bone necklaces that she was entering in an art competition.

She told us how once, when she was driving, she saw a dead snake on the road. Cassie was excited to take it home to use in her art. When she was preparing the snake to clean the bones, she opened it up and there was another snake inside it!

She made two awesome necklaces out of the snakes.



Thanks Cassie! You are a 'legend' for helping Briagolong Primary School celebrate Aboriginal culture.

We think that learning about Aboriginal culture around the Gippsland Lakes is a very important part of understanding our local area.

We can't wait until you visit again with more interesting things to show or teach us.



Cassie Leatham with school captains
Riley and Aidan wearing Cassie's possum skin rugs.



2015 Year 5/6

Briagolong Primary School

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www.loveourlakes.net.au

