

Case study three, 2008: Indigenous book development project, Maroon

The story of Maroon – shining a light on understanding

This is the third in a series of case studies of projects that received Indigenous Lighthouse Grant funding in 2008. Indigenous Lighthouse Grants recognise best practice and encourage innovation in Queensland.

These grants aim to shine a light on exemplars of good practice in Indigenous education, training and arts by fostering innovation and collaboration across those areas – with a view to improving cultural awareness, and outcomes of Indigenous students.

The grants also provide a vehicle for celebrating the successes of Queensland's 'clever, skilled and creative' Indigenous students.

A small amount of funding through the Indigenous Lighthouse Grants has made a world of difference to the children of Maroon State School and their understanding of Indigenous culture.

Students and staff from the school, near Aratula just east of Cunningham's Gap, met local Aboriginal children and tried Aboriginal food while taking part in a tree planting activity as part of a project related to Indigenous issues.

This experience made an impact on Principal Larry Duncalfe and the students and staff of the school.

'I realised my students - none of them Indigenous - had very little interaction with Indigenous peoples, particularly those who come from the area around Maroon and Beaudesert. They certainly did not have much of an understanding of Aboriginal culture or stories,' Mr Duncalfe said.

He saw an opportunity to encourage his students to interact with the Indigenous experience and thought that art was the perfect vehicle to achieve this through the development of an Indigenous local area story. The result would be a book using some Indigenous words about the local area based on Indigenous stories.

'After all, our school shirts carry a picture of a lizard, a water monitor and 'maroon' is the Indigenous word for lizard – so this seemed like a good sign,' he said.



Mr Duncalfe realised the project would need to be developed within a strong partnership with local Indigenous people so he contacted the Mununjali Housing Corporation and met George Currie, Aboriginal Elder and Mununjali man.

The school engaged Mr Currie to come to the school and work with the students to produce an illustrated book telling the story of Maroon.

Mr Currie said he had a wonderful time getting to know the children and helping them to re-tell an ancient legend.

'I told the true essence of the story then allowed them to use their imagination to put it in their ways – from their perspective,' Mr Currie said.

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Mr Currie also planted trees with the children. He told them stories of his childhood and asked them to share their family stories. He introduced them to the different art forms and different ways to see situations. He encouraged them to use their senses outside the classroom to experience the bush, feeling the bark of trees and the texture of the soil.

The children were enthusiastic about the experience of researching and making the book.

School leaders Hayley Gabriel and Conrad Black loved making the book.

'It was great,' Hayley said. 'I'm really proud of making the book. It was fun — especially the art. Mr Currie taught us how to do a lot of the work and see things through Indigenous eyes.'



Conrad said he learnt a lot from the experience.

'I learnt how important it is to understand the Indigenous culture because the Aboriginal people are native to Australia, and we need to get along.'

Julie Valenzuela, an art teacher and occasional relief teacher, said making the book was a marvellous process, especially working with George Currie.

'George introduced us to a lot of Aboriginal culture — it wasn't just about the art.'

'It was about his life experience, his family, and awareness-raising really.'

'He completely embraced the idea of the children creating the book — it was to be their representation of the story. All the children were involved, from the Preps to Year Seven. George was very generous in his approach and an excellent communicator too — very good at drawing out the kids.'



Mr Duncalfe has noticed a change in the attitudes and understanding of the children who participated in the project.

'I can definitely see a shift in attitudes and an increased acknowledgement of and respect for the Indigenous culture — which is a great outcome.'

George Currie said he would get involved with other projects like this in the future too.

'It's just about taking the time to sit down and listen. The kids were enthusiastic about everything and they showed a lot of respect.'

'I've found if you let the kids take the reins, they come up with brilliant ideas. All I do is direct them, have fun and they do the rest.'

The Legend of Maroon is available from Maroon State School.