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Laugh again, Kinta!

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Reading Level: Picture Book for Younger Readers



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Book description

It must have been a faraway place, surely a long time ago...

Kinta does not feel at all like laughing when he realises he's been separated from his family. Can he remember how to laugh when it might be the only way to find another kookaburra in this strange new place?

Laugh again, Kinta! is a fiction picture book for primary school age children, loosely based on the introduction of kookaburras to Western Australia in the late 1800's. Although an Australian story, it is one that touches on our universal search for home, happiness and our sense of self.

As well as reading his story you can also follow Kinta's journey on the game board-style timeline surrounding each main illustration, as new players come and go. You can look out for Kinta's dragonfly companion, sometimes hidden, sometimes in plain view.

The book's last page features information on kookaburras and a brief history of their introduction to Western Australia.

About the author & illustrator



I live in Adelaide, South Australia, after many years of living in Western Australia. Together with my husband Barry and our children Ben, Brodie and Rob we had some wonderful adventures since leaving our original home of Adelaide, living in Australia's tropical north, in Darwin, and spending two years in Seattle, Washington.

I love creating, and my childhood interest in drawing and writing has become a grown-up passion for graphic design and illustration, and a long-held desire to write and illustrate a children's storybook.

As a non-native Western Australian I was surprised to hear that kookaburras were introduced to WA, assuming this bird was found Australia-wide. I felt there was potential for a story, as someone who had moved many times, both as a child and an adult.

The writing of *Laugh again, Kinta!* also arose from the challenge of finding confidence in myself despite the fears and blockages which I scattered along my path. Children can, like us grown-ups, experience much in the way of upheaval and insecurity. It is my hope Kinta's story is an encouragement to trust our own inner guidance, so that home and laughter, can be found wherever we are.

Historical background

The Western Australian Acclimatization Committee, which later became the Zoological Gardens Board, first introduced kookaburras from the eastern states in 1897. Acclimatization represented a viewpoint of the day that any animals, birds or plants deemed useful, exotic or attractive be introduced to the colony, often instigated by private individuals, then formalised later in a zoological gardens organisation.

Mr Ernest Le Souëf (later Lieutenant-Colonel), the first Director of the Perth Zoo, strongly advocated the introduction of kookaburras as a counter to tiger snakes, fearing an increase in their numbers with the top dressing of pastures. The snakes did not multiply as expected, and ironically do not make up a large part of the kookaburra's diet.

Hundreds of Victorian birds were released from 1897 to 1912, at Perth Zoo and elsewhere including Gingin in 1903 and Warren River in 1909. While visiting the Perth Zoo in 1901 the Duke and Duchess of York, in keeping with the tradition of acclimatization, planted two Norfolk Island pine trees and released 80 kookaburras. Today kookaburras are well established in the South-West of Western Australia, north to Jurien Bay, south to Albany and districts and east to Bremer Bay.

Kookaburras were also introduced to Tasmania, Flinders and Kangaroo Islands and the Harauki Gulf of New Zealand. While some are concerned about their predatory impact on small bird populations where introduced, scientist Dr Sarah Legge believes there is no evidence that they have caused declines in any of their prey or for out-competing other local hollow-users. All studies have shown that eggs, chicks and adult birds make up a tiny part of their diet.

References:

Legge, Sarah (2004) *Kookaburra: King of the Bush*, CSIRO Publishing

Jenkins, C.F.H. (1977) *The Noah's Ark Syndrome: One hundred years of acclimatization and zoo development in Australia*, Zoological Gardens Board of Western Australia, Perth WA

Johnstone, R.E. and Storr, G.M. (1998) *Handbook of Western Australian Birds Vol. I: Non-passerines (Emu to Dollar Bird)*, Western Australian Museum, Perth WA

A true story

- from a family involved with the introduction of kookaburras to Western Australia

Since writing *Laugh again, Kinta!* I have been fortunate to learn of a story from Ian Edgar, great grandson of Alec Edgar, that has been passed down through the Edgar family.

Ian's great grandfather Alec owned property at Gingin. Through his friendship with Ernest Le Souëf an official release of kookaburras was arranged to take place at 'Strathalbyn', one of Alec's properties, simultaneously with other releases in Western Australia in 1903.

Alec Edgar picked up the box of 6 kookaburras from the Gingin rail station but "*his fourth child, Ian, was curious to look at the strange birds and opened the wooden cage, [and] two flew out. The dignitary released the remaining birds at the pre-set time – not knowing that two kookaburras were sitting on a branch above his head. He had been upstaged by a boy, much to the amusement of a considerable crowd for those times.*

This is my father's version of events – the story has been passed down and possible value added – who knows!"*

*Ronald Edgar, 83, 2008

Characters

Kinta the kookaburra, his mother, father and family, Cockatoo (Sulphur-crested), Goanna (Gould's Goanna), Wagtail, Snake (a Western Tiger snake), Emu, Boobook Owl and Kirri the kookaburra. Oh, and "wings," a human rescuer!

Setting

The Victorian countryside is the setting for the first part of *Laugh again, Kinta!* Kinta is then transported by ship to Western Australia following the southern coast of Australia until docking at the port of Albany, a major port until Fremantle harbour is upgraded in 1897. Kinta's new home is set in Gingin, approximately one hour north of Perth.

On a visit to Gingin I walked the Jim Gordon VC Trail that follows Gingin Brook and found a perfect setting for Kinta's new home. Certainly the 'fairyland' described by some visitors as the Flooded Gums (*Eucalyptus rudis*) and Swamp Paperbarks (*Melaleuca raphiophylla*) arch and criss-cross over the boardwalk. The lush undergrowth such as native ferns, sedges and rushes are fed by the brook, which is Western Australia's only perennial freshwater stream between Perth and the Kimberley region.

Prior to the 1920's quokkas, quendas and marsupial water rats were common in the brook area but due to the introduction of the European rabbit and fox, their numbers quickly dwindled. Today you can still see birds such as the Splendid and Red-winged Fairy Wrens and Grey Fantails. On the day I visited there were many dragonflies flying around, two doing a mating 'tango' in the shape of the number 6. A local resident said she enjoyed hearing the kookaburras at dawn and especially in the evening, near her home by the brook.

Themes

Natural disaster

Separation from family

Overcoming fear

Friendship

Arriving in a new place

Finding a new home

Facing opposition

Remembering how to laugh

Connecting with others

Class discussion ideas

As the bushfire approaches Cockatoo and Goanna warn the others to leave the area. Whose job is it to warn people when there are fires or other natural disasters happening?

Kinta was separated from his parents during the bushfire. Have you ever been separated from your mother or father? How did you feel?

Kinta's parents are not able to return to him and he is taken away to a safer place. What do you think might have happened to them?

A long journey at sea is ahead of Kinta as he travels to his new home. How might he be feeling on this trip? Has anyone ever had to travel a long distance to move house or even move countries? How did you cope with the changes? Did you have your parents there with you all the time?

If you moved to a different home, do you remember what it was like discovering all the new things about that place; the different house and your new bedroom, shops, neighbours, parks and streets? Were the people there friendly to you and your family?

Kinta hears that not everyone in his new home wants him to be there. How would he be feeling? Have you ever had someone made you feel unwelcome when you first arrived somewhere (eg. your first day in a new school or on a sporting team?). How did their unfriendly behaviour make you feel?

Have you ever felt uncomfortable with a new person in your class or street and didn't know how to be with them? Was it hard to imagine how they might be feeling? What are some of the ways you could make a new person feel welcome?

Kinta is glad to hear there is another kookaburra like him but knows he has to remember how to laugh so they know he is there. Although he is excited he is afraid too. Have you had a time when you had a big fear to overcome to get or do something you really wanted?

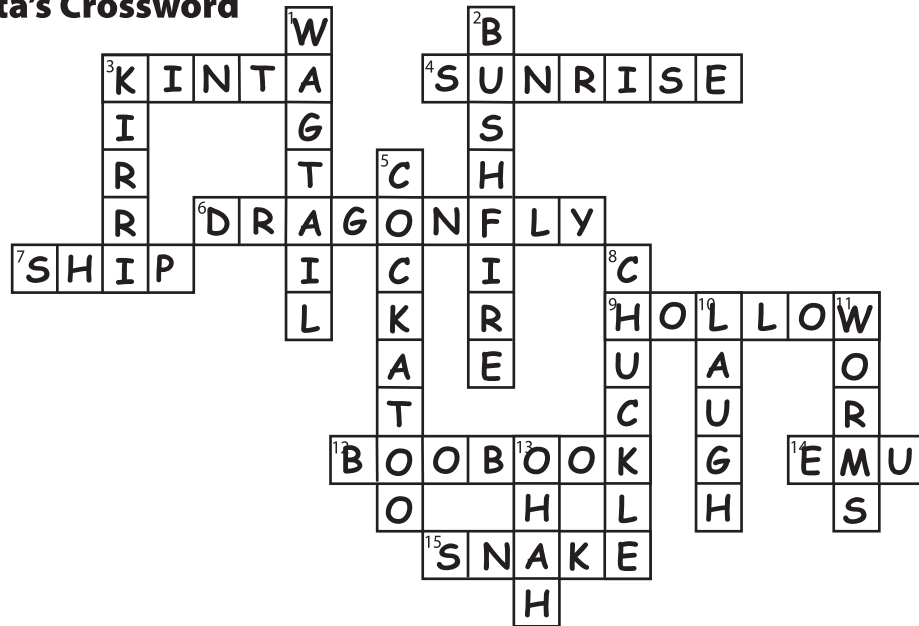
Class discussion ideas ...continued

Remembering what his family taught him about laughing and the reminder from his friend dragonfly helped Kinta to find the courage to laugh again. What helped you put away your fear and find courage? Was it the love or words from a friend or your family, or maybe a strength from inside you?

Kinta and Kirri have a new beginning in a new home. Can you think of examples of people in the world today who have had to make a new start?

Activity Sheet Answers

Kinta's Crossword



Kinta's Word Search

S K I N T A R
G K O O B O O B E
H N B
O I D M
K L W R E
O L S A M
O O O N G E E
K T W A O R R
A H S A K K N I
B G M K I E F F
U U R C R L H E
R A O O R Y S M
R L W C I U O
A B H
L I A T G A W