

**Articulation of Practice:
Text Analysis of the Song Munjana by Archie Roach**

Intercultural Understanding and Indigenous Perspectives in Education

The embedding of intercultural understanding in the National Curriculum as a General Capability is intended to “encourage students to make connections between their own worlds and the worlds of others, to build on shared interests and commonalities, and to negotiate or mediate difference”, and to foster “expressing empathy, demonstrating respect and taking responsibility” (ACARA 2018a). The inclusion of intercultural understanding is built on the historical and ongoing work of advocates for social change through education, such as John Dewy, and including voices penetrating the status quo from the margins, like Nelson Mandela and Martin Nakata. It is promoted as a pathway to solidify inclusive education, breakdown cultural and systemic forms of racism, and improve the prospects of marginalised groups (McDonald 2013; Nakata 2011). Pedagogies supporting intercultural understanding stimulate positive social dispositions among students and improve opportunities for learning through providing culturally sensitive and flexible environments which cater to needs and inspire engagement of diverse learners (Au 2009; Nakata 2011).

Similarly, the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives via the Cross-Curriculum Priorities (ACARA 2018b) has the potential to redress imbalances of power created by ongoing cultural and institutional racism, by providing lessons which are respectful to Aboriginal students and their families, thus supporting their full education potential within the current Anglo dominated system. Allowing Aboriginal students to be seen, heard and valued within the curriculum, provides *all* students with opportunities to meaningfully engage with and develop deeper levels of respect for Aboriginal culture, and enhance understanding and empathy for Aboriginal pre and post-colonial experiences (ACARA 2018b; Craven & Price 2011). However, simply studying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures and Histories (ACARA 2018b) does not necessarily guarantee the incorporation of authentic Indigenous perspectives (Craven & Price 2011; McDonald 2013; Nakata 2011; Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011). Time and critical reflection are important in considering what Indigenous perspectives are and how they may be incorporated (Nakata 2011; Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011).

Text and Context

A commonly cited and readily accessible pedagogy for addressing intercultural understanding and Indigenous perspectives is the use of contextually appropriate texts (Cloonan, O’Mara & Ohi 2014; McDonald 2013; Walsh, Cranitch & Maras 2012). The text selected for critical analysis here, in preparation for use in VCE psychology classes, is the song *Munjana*, by Bunjalung-Gunditjmara man Archie Roach, Figure 1. The song tells the true story of Beverly Moore (Munjana is her Aboriginal name) whose son,

Munjana

Archie Roach

Album: Charcoal Lane (1990)

Times were hard in old Swan Hill
And her circumstances got harder still
The only thing this woman ever knew was pain
It seemed she'd never know sweet happiness again
Kicked around, treated bad
It's not right for one so young to be so sad
A Koori child should not have had this cross to bear
It makes me wonder if anybody really cares
Troubled woman is your name
Through no fault of yours it seems you always got the blame
And an old man's voice calls from afar

Who will shed a tear for Munjana?

Fond memories of Moulamein
The only happy times her family had seen
Wishing that those happy times would never end
With Uncle John who at the time was their best friend
But this young girl just couldn't win
She got in to trouble in Deniliquin
Had a lovely child way down in old Fitzroy
Then the Welfare came and took her baby boy
Baby Russell was his name
They took him from her arms and made her feel ashamed
Took him away to America

Who will shed a tear for Munjana?

They changed his name and changed his home
While he was growing up he always felt alone
And through the years his history remained untold
He questioned why so they kicked him out at 12 years old
He was on the streets for many years
No-one ever knew his pain or saw his tears
He took to using drugs and booze just to escape
Then one night they arrested him for murder and rape
Troubled woman, troubled man
Doesn't anybody out there give a damn?
And an old man's voice calls from afar

Who will shed a tear for Munjana?

His one true mother who'd searched in vain
For her son she never thought she'd see again
She received a phone call from Florida
They found her son and more bad news for Munjana
Hello Russell, this is your mother calling
Please forgive me I can't stop the tears from falling
You come from this land and sun above
And always remember the strength of your mother's love
They took you there when you were five
Now you're in some jail trying to survive
And if the truth be told when all have testified
Another crime committed here was genocide
Troubled woman is your name
Through no fault of yours it seemed you always got the blame
And an old man's voice calls from afar

Who will shed a tear for Munjana?

Who will shed a tear for Munjana?

Figure 1: Song Lyrics to Archie Roach's *Munjana*. Source: Genius Media Group 2018, link to audio recording of the song <https://genius.com/Archie-roach-munjana-lyrics>

Russell, was removed at birth under government policies that contributed to the Stolen Generations (Schwartz 2015). That the selected text is a song, fits with modern ideas about multiliteracies (eg Kalantzis & Cope 2012) and values Aboriginal *Story Sharing* pedagogies, which frame oral traditions as “Indigenous academic expression” (Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011, p.205).

As a *Way In* text (after Bintz 2011), *Munjana*, could stimulate investigation into the Stolen Generations, in a way that is Constructively Aligned, using Backwards Design (Wiggins & McTighe 2005), to the VCE Psychology Study Design (SD); where a biopsychosocial model is used to explain how marginalised groups are affected by “social factors [which] are involved in the development and management of a mental disorder”, and include “disorganised attachment, loss of a significant relationship and the role of stigma as a barrier to accessing treatment” (VCAA 2015, p.29-30). The text is developmentally appropriate for year 11 students who, according to Piaget, Erikson and Steiner’s theories of child development, have a growing interest in making sense of social and political issues and of finding their place in the world.

The use of *Munjana* is a challenge to dominate Anglo paradigms in education, by demonstrating the inclusion and importance of marginalised voices. The centrality of Indigenous perspectives in *Munjana*, does what *The Diary of Anne Frank* did for Gruwell’s (2011) Freedom Writers, it “gives a voice to the voiceless”; thus, provides an opportunity for Aboriginal, and the other marginalised students, to see themselves within the text, and the curriculum; which may boost self-esteem and respect from others (ACARA 2018b; Craven & Price 2011). *Munjana* may also enable Aboriginal

students to act as co-educators within the classroom, since they may be able to lead understanding of the text

through personal experience and shared expression, although this cannot be assumed. Refugee and International students in particular are likely to have little knowledge of the Stolen Generations or understand colloquialisms of the text and will benefit socially and intellectually by learning about Australia's first peoples, anchored in the reality of sharing a class with Indigenous students.

The Voice of Munjana

Munjana narrates the story of an Aboriginal woman and is written by an Aboriginal man, who personally knows the subject, and is himself also a member of the Stolen Generations (Schwartz 2015). While this detail is not evident in the song itself, it is important in identifying the authenticity of the Indigenous perspective. The teaching strategy used with this text, discussed in the next section, is not an exercise in pure textual analysis by students, however, the selection of the text by the teacher does require detailed critical analysis to assess its inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, cultural sensitivities, suitability and relevance to the curriculum and class.

According to Johnston's (2010) framework for understanding how a text works, at the Level of Story, *Munjana*, tells of the difficult and sorrow-filled life of Munjana and her son who is forcibly removed from her care by a welfare agency as a baby. Growing up, Russell is unaware of his Aboriginal heritage, and through a series of misdeeds by multiple carers, he ends up a homeless teenager in America, where he is currently in prison for murder and rape. At the Level of Telling the Story (Johnston 2010), Roach uses poetic structures including rhythmic and rhyming words and emotional devices via narrative choices including word selection and tone of music and voice, which accentuate the mother's suffering. The Understory (Johnston 2010) speaks to impacts of the removal of Aboriginal children of the Stolen Generations and the broader context of social and institutional racism, including genocide and discrimination within the legal system. In this way Roach provides a contextual explanation for the suffering of the protagonists, and while he doesn't excuse the crimes, he stimulates thinking of racial disparities impacting upon the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people, such as disproportionate incarceration rates (AHRC 2014).

Table 1 shows an analysis of *Munjana* using McDonald's (2013) framework for exploring Indigenous dimensions of country/place culture and people. This framework reveals that even though Aboriginal people are portrayed as victims within Roach's text, they are also presented as powerful agents of cultural and social knowledge who are very aware and willing to speak of injustices they have endured, and who despite suffering maintain a strong spiritual identity and connection to country. While we want to avoid deficit

discourses when talking about any students (Comber & Kamler 2004), it is also important that we do not shy away from discussing current and historical issues negatively affecting Aboriginal people (Craven & Price 2011). Using texts that so clearly assert an Indigenous perspective, are potentially excellent resources for non-Aboriginal teachers to draw upon when presenting culturally sensitive topics. In the current context, the pedagogical content knowledge (Godinho 2016, 263) of psychology can also be used to breakdown racial stereotypes, since the biopsychosocial model helps identify the impact of social pressures and suggests that people generally behave and suffer in the same ways when certain circumstances prevail.

Table 1: Application of McDonald's (2013) framework for exploring dimensions of country/place culture and people to the song *Munjana* by Archie Roach

	Response	Quoted Evidence
<p>1. Endorsement</p> <p>Does the text have an endorsement from an appropriate group or name the country of the writer and illustrator?</p>	<p>While the text does not name the people or country of the writer, it is known that Archie Roach is an Aboriginal man of Bunjalung-Gunditjmara descent, is a member of the Stolen Generations, and personally knows the main protagonist of the text (Schwartz 2015). Beverly Moore's Aboriginal, Munjana, is given as the title to the track and she features as the main protagonist in the song.</p>	<p>Title: Munjana</p>
	<p>Places/country where Munjana lived are mentioned in the song</p>	<p>Times were hard in old Swan Hill Fond memories of Moulamein The only happy times her family had seen She got in to trouble in Deniliquin</p>
	<p>Russell's place of birth is stated And place of conception is inferred</p>	<p>Had a lovely child way down in old Fitzroy She got in to trouble in Deniliquin</p>
<p>2. People/Culture: Status/Power</p> <p>Who has authority and knowledge?</p> <p>Who can speak/act on problems in the text?</p> <p>Does this occur in ways appropriate to Indigenous culture?</p>	<p>The negative power and authority of Welfare agencies, acting in accord with government policies of the time are an important feature of this song, including removing the child, renaming the child, not informing the child of his biological parentage or ancestral past, and finally abandoning him in America. From a non-Indigenous perspective, the white authorities might therefore be the most powerful agents in this song.</p> <p>However, the Aboriginal songwriter challenges these racist policies and actions of the past, and identifies the suffering caused to the Aboriginal people. Thus, the Aboriginal song writer is the one who his speaking with power and authority about the problems in the text, and gives voice to marginalised characters, who are central to the narrative, while the white authorities are minimised with impersonal pronouns. The behaviour and circumstances of Aboriginal people are reframed by the songwriter who throughout the narrative draws attention to the context of racism (without using that word), and the consequent victimisation and repressed agency of Aboriginal people.</p> <p>The Author has knowledge about the people in the story and exercises this in a powerful way by using an Aboriginal name, Munjana, which non-aboriginal people may not have access to in main stream reporting about the story. He is also sharing the story and acts as a keeper of the story.</p>	<p>Then <i>the Welfare</i> came and took her baby boy <i>They</i> took him from her arms and made her feel ashamed Took him away to America <i>They</i> changed his name and changed his home And through the years his history remained untold He questioned why so they kicked him out at 12 years old <i>They</i> took you there when you were five Now you're in <i>some jail</i> trying to survive (emphasis added)</p> <p>Kicked around, treated bad It's not right for one so young to be so sad A Koori child should not have had this cross to bear Through no fault of yours it seemed you always got the blame</p>

		Cultural authority is also given to Munjana who when she finally gets to speak to her son for the first time connects him to people and country, by telling him who his family is and where he comes from. She also reframes his crimes by contextualising them within the context of the crimes enacted upon her son and Aboriginal people in general by the government and atrocities of colonisation.	Hello Russell, this is your mother calling You come from this land and sun above And always remember the strength of your mother's love They took you there when you were five And if the truth be told when all have testified Another crime committed here was genocide
3.	Country/Place/Culture: Context Are Indigenous social structures/family networks recognised? Is there understanding and respect for the complexity of Indigenous knowledge and belief systems?	Cultural authority is given to an Aboriginal man in the song, via the title of Uncle, which infers eldership within the community and indicates the cultural knowledge and respect of the songwriter in a way that is consistent with Indigenous protocols. The way that Uncle John is referred to as the family's best friend is also an indication of the important role that Aboriginal elders play supporting families within the community. Significant spiritual authority is also given to the voice of the old man in the song. We are not sure if this voice is that of Uncle John, or of an ancestor spirit, or indeed the now ancestral spirit of Uncle John. Either way this Aboriginal voice acts as a powerful call, for us not to forget the story of Munjana, and asks who will be called to grieve, echoing a call to some action in an ongoing struggle for recognition and justice. It also reminds the listener, of the continuity of Aboriginal people's unique Spirituality which includes active ancestral spirits.	Uncle John who at the time was their best friend And an old man's voice calls from afar Who will shed a tear for Munjana?
4.	Culture/People/Place: Language Is Standard English (SE) privileged? Is Aboriginal English (AE) or Language included?	Standard English is not given a privilege place here, but is rather mixed with colloquial turns of phrase, an Aboriginal name, and AE, which appears in the accent or phrasing of the song rather than unique words; and is subtler than explicitly AE texts where the use of grammar diverts significantly from SE (McDonald 2013). The song also uses poetic devices including rhyming and rhythmic words, and cuts out the use of connecting words	old Swan Hill way down in old Fitzroy treated bad booze Munjana Hello Russell, this is your mother calling Please forgive me I can't stop the tears from falling Took him away to America

Teaching Strategy

While there are many ways to work with this text, here *Munjana* will be used primarily as a *Way In* (after Bintz 2011) to study social factors impacting on the mental wellbeing of marginalised groups, beginning with the Stolen Generations. The teaching strategy in focus is the Aboriginal pedagogy of “yarning” or *Story Telling* combined with *Community Links* (Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011), wherein a local Aboriginal Elder would be invited to visit the class and “yarn” about the Stolen Generations. This lesson requires careful planning in advance, flexibility and a back-up plan in case it is not possible¹. The strategy features modelling best practice for Aboriginal engagement in a way that reflects the Aboriginal pedagogy of *Deconstruct-Reconstruct* (Yunkaporta & Kirby 2011). Planning is informed by research and personal experience², and includes:

- Working with Aboriginal support staff in the school, and local Aboriginal organisations (eg. Nulderun, Bendigo and District Aboriginal Cooperative, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation, and Taungurung Clans Corporation) to explore the possibility of engaging an Aboriginal Elder from the local community.
- Negotiating funding with the school administration to pay a teaching fee to the Aboriginal Elder.
- Talking with the Elder before-hand to ensure that they’re comfortable yarning about the Stolen Generations and giving them some background to our studies and students in the class.
- Ensuring the Elder has transport, and if not organising it (e.g. providing a Taxi).
- Consideration of the Aboriginal student/s in the class, discussing content with them and support staff³.

This student maybe be involved in planning this lesson through “dialogue” and “collaboration”, working with staff as “an act of reconciliation” (Yunkaporta (in Yunkaporta and Kirby 2011, p.212). They may also

¹ An alternative plan might be to have a guest cultural officer from a local or state-wide Aboriginal organisation; or, a worker from a local Health Service to who could talk on issues effecting Aboriginal people and the kinds of support available (this may happen anyway and will be particularly suited to the psychology SD if this person was able to cover a range of vulnerable groups).

² I have worked and volunteered with Aboriginal people for more than 12 years, through NGOs, in public education and in grassroots organisations, and feel a great privileged to count several Aboriginal Elders among my close friends and feel immensely grateful for the lessons and culture they have shared with me. These experiences will inform how I work as a teacher with Aboriginal students and intercultural understandings. The very first protocol for doing this, as I have been taught, is to engage local people and follow their guidance; as Yunkaporta (in Yunkaporta and Kirby 2011, p.209) says “you have to engage as a related person belonging to a place”. It is also important that I acknowledge my own cultural identity (Weuffen, Cahi, & Pickford 2017, p.846). Even though I am directly descended from Tahitian women who were taken by the mutineers of The Bounty, and am the granddaughter of a Hungarian boat refugee, I am a mostly Anglo-Saxon woman, in blood and cultural upbringing; and even though I come from a lower-class background, I have a high level of education. Thus, despite some disadvantage, I occupy a privileged position in a society where Anglo skin tones and traditions dominate governing institutions and social mores.

³ The psychology SD advises teachers on the sensitive nature of material in the curriculum, and warns that it may impact upon any student, and thus advises working closely with school Wellbeing teams (ACARA 2015, p.8).

assist with tasks involved in hosting an Elder, including: meeting and greeting before the lesson, providing refreshments, introduction to class, leading student questions, offering a lunch invitation, presenting thanks and a gift, and escorting the Elder off campus at the end of the visit. These responsibilities would need to be negotiated with student and assessed for cultural and individual appropriateness and may also be shared with non-Aboriginal students.

- Preparing the class for the topic and visit with an Elder, by doing and talking about:
 - An introductory lesson to the topic: playing *Munjana* in class, critically analysing it in relation to meaning and correlation to the psychology SD, student inquiry-based research into the Stolen Generations and health impacts of racism on Aboriginal people (e.g. Craven & Price 2011, p.43).
 - Showing respect for Aboriginal people, and protocols for being with Elders.
 - Indigenous perspectives on healing and mental health, including the role of Ngangkari (NPYWAC 2013) and Deep Listening (Dadirri) (Ungunmerr- Baumann 2002).
 - Aboriginal pedagogies including yarning, non-verbal communication, body language, deep listening, and taking time (Yunkaporta and Kirby 2011).
 - Sorry business and not mentioning deceased people.
 - Compiling a set of questions before the visit.

In line with the finding that pre-service teachers benefit from cultural workshops as an effective strategy for engaging with Indigenous perspectives (Weuffen, Cahir & Pickford 2017), I believe that secondary students are likely to most deeply engage in intercultural understanding through lived experience of meeting an Elder. Furthermore, the yarning session provides opportunities to cater to diverse learners as it calls on multiple intelligences, including: verbal-linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, existential, and moral intelligences (Gardener 2011). The teacher will be able to gauge student understanding by monitoring body language, concentration, and interest, and asking students directly if they understand points in the conversation. The teacher and students can ask the Elder clarifying questions, but this will need to be done in a sensitive manner, after explaining that some students do not have English as a first language and come from countries with different customs; and considering personal experience, reiterated by Yunkaporta and Kirby (2011), that asking lots of questions and expecting to get knowledge is not always culturally appropriate. Students will be reassured that it is ok not to understand everything all at once, but that deep listening and letting the experience sink in are important (Yunkaporta and Kirby 2011).

Transcript for Video Presentation

Good morning everyone

Today I want to talk about the song Munjana, written by Bunglung-Gunditjmara man Archie Roach. This song has been selected for use with senior secondary students and particularly VCE psychology students who within Units 2 and 4 consider the social impacts affecting mental health and wellbeing of marginalised people.

According to Johnston's framework of critical textual analysis, at the level of story, Munjana tells the true story of Aboriginal woman Beverly Moore, whose Aboriginal name is Munjana, who has her son Russell forcibly removed as a baby via government policies that contributed to the Stolen Generations. Without Beverly's knowledge, and with no knowledge of his Indigenous heritage, Russell is taken to America. Through the misdeeds of multiple carers, he ends up homeless on the streets as a teenager; and eventually in a prison in Florida serving time for murder and rape. Despite efforts by many advocates, Russell has not been returned to Australia to finish serving his sentence here.

At Johnston's level of telling, how Roach tells the story is through song, which relates to Aboriginal oral traditions and story-telling as an Aboriginal pedagogy of teaching and learning. In the song Roach uses poetic devices of rhyming and rhythm in choice of words, and the selected tone of his voice and the music is also very important for conveying the suffering of Munjana.

At the level of understory Roach is really using this example of one woman, whom he personally knows, to talk about the effects of systemic and cultural racism, that still effect Aboriginal people in Australia today. Specifically, he is talking about the Stolen Generations, but he also highlights the context of genocide, and the ineffectiveness of the justice system in serve Aboriginal people.

What I really like about this song is that Aboriginal perspectives are very clear. Not only is Archie Roach an Aboriginal man telling a story, about Aboriginal people, there are also quite a lot of references to Aboriginal culture within the song. If we look at McDonald's framework for exploring dimensions of country place culture and people in the song, we can really see that despite the fact that Aboriginal people are victims within the song, and while we want to avoid deficit discourses that portray them in a negative way, we can actually see that they are the people in the story who are holding up the truth, and are maintaining their unique spirituality and connection to country.

I think Munjana is an excellent example of Indigenous perspectives dominating the text, which has the potential to be used to enhance intercultural understanding and empathy for Indigenous experiences.

Thank-you.

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