

# CLASSIC AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE:

lessons for life Suitable for  
Grades 7-10



## Indigenous Poems - Oodgeroo Noonuccal

### INTRODUCTION

The indigenous poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal is significant in the history of Australian culture. The political and cultural themes of dispossession and cultural divides are as relevant now as the time in which they were written. Students will examine two different styles of poetry, their structure, style and historical context; from their understanding of contemporary issues they will create texts, design visual elements of story, research local history and create biographical articles. A variety of texts are available as resources including radio interview, historical archives, poetry websites and youtube clips. Included are poetry analysis worksheets, vocabulary activities and suggested summative and formative assessment.

### POEMS

'We are going' [available online at <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poets/noonuccal-oodgeroo> ]

'No more boomerang'



This poem is read aloud to the indigenous music of the band 'coloured stone'  
<http://youtu.be/codU1Ei2Etg>

### Summary

Oodgeroo Noonuccal (formerly known as Kath walker ) was the first indigenous female poet to have her works published in 1964 to great success as the title *We are going*. Awarded the OBE in 1970 she famously returned the honour in 1987 in protest of the Bicentennial Celebrations Australia Day 1988. Born on North Stradbroke Island *Minjerribah* she worked in domestic service in Brisbane while raising two children. She returned to Minjerribah as a 'grandmother' and educator to the children of the island.

This series of poems will be analysed using the method SMILES

**S tructure** line length, organisation of text, rhyme scheme, syllables

**M eaning** title, overall theme, message, subject

**I magery** visual picture, literary features, symbolism, irony

**L anguage** grammar, punctuation, use of words – simple, complex, lyrical, colloquial, ironic

**E ffect** opinion, bias or message presented by poet

**S ound** onomatopoeia, rhythm of spoken text

## Resources (these can be used for extension or grades 9,10)

'Memories of Childhood' Verbatim at National Radio Broadcast – Oodgeroo Noonuccal

[http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2008/08/vim\\_20080821.mp3](http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2008/08/vim_20080821.mp3)

OneSearch on State Library QLD website search – North Stradbroke Island link 'images' eg 'Myora Mission 1906'

'In the beginning' History of Minjerribah

[https://www.google.com.au/search?q=in+the+beginning+minjerribah&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws\\_rd=cr&ei=VazmVKLRMIX-8QWxhYGQCA](https://www.google.com.au/search?q=in+the+beginning+minjerribah&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=VazmVKLRMIX-8QWxhYGQCA)

## WORKSHEET

Waddy

Woomera

Lubra

Firestick

Gunya

Nigger

**Vocabulary Quiz** (students can guess then look up online)

Add any more words you do not recognise to this list.

Message stick



*No More Boomerang*

Structure how is the poem organised? How many stanzas or verses are there? What is the rhyming scheme? ie ABAB (each rhyming set is named by a consecutive letter) how do the ideas progress? What is the line length in syllables? Is there repetition of words and or phrases?

Meaning What does the title tell us? What is the message of the poem?

Imagery What visual picture does the poem paint for the reader? What are some examples of phrases and words which provide this imagery? Are there any metaphors, similes, personification or alliteration in the poem? List them.

Language What style of language is used? Think of words like: lyrical, blunt, ironic, concise, flowing, colloquial, pidgin, academic, descriptive

Effect What bias or opinion is presented in the poem? How is this achieved? Is there a particular tone used? What do you feel when you read it, what is your response?

Sound How is the poem read out loud..does it have sound effects ie onomatopoeia

 ***We are going***

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### Activities (Grades 7,8)

1. Using the colour coding, identify the language features in each of the poems:

 Metaphor/simile  personification  alliteration  irony

 juxtaposition

2. Draw up a table with two columns. List words and phrases that highlight the style of language of the each poems. Why do you think Noonuccal has used a pidgin style English in *No More Boomerangs* compared to a 'proper' English for *We are going*?

No More Boomerangs	We are going
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Eg: end everybody

3. Fill in the chart below using information from the poems and 'In the beginning' PDF. Make notes about life on Minjerribah for Noonuccal

	Before Colonial Settlement	After settlement
Food		
Communication		
Money/resources		
Environmental management		
Shelter		
Cultural activities		

4. Illustrate *We are going* with storyboard sequences to match the chronology of the tale.
5. Write a piece of rhyming poetry on a contemporary issue using similar theme to *No More Boomerang*
6. Listen to the Verbatim interview of Kath Walker and produce a timeline of indigenous rights in Australia

## Assessment Ideas

### Summative

Write a imaginative piece ( letter or journal entry) written from the perspective of a resident living on North Stradbroke Island ie an event such as the building of the mission, an escape from the benevolent asylum, a corroboree, using the outline of a short story.

Write a biographical feature article on the life of Oodgeroo Noonuccal.

Based upon the notes from 'In the Beginning' table above write a persuasive essay that argues:

The indigenous population of Minjerribah would have been better off had they not been 'settled' by Colonial England.

OR

The indigenous population of Minjerribah benefited greatly from the presence of colonial England

## Extra Research

OBE: Oodgeroo received the Order of the British Empire in 1970. She famously returned it just prior to the Australia Day Bicentennial Celebration in protest of indigenous treatment. Youtube has footage of the 1988 Sydney celebration and the indigenous march for land rights.

Half caste aborigines: 'white' aboriginal children were removed from their homes and put into service just as Kath Walker was.



## Teachers' Notes

### *No More Boomerang*

The poem is structured in thirteen four line stanzas with the rhyme sequence ABCB

The message communicated in the poem is that 'civilisation' or white colonisation has not improved the life of indigenous people. This is suggested via irony

The visual imagery of old tribal ways contrasted with 'white' modern society is produced via juxtaposition. For example, 'free corroboree vs paid movie' for entertainment, 'spear vs beer', 'firesticks vs electric' 'messagestick vs TV'

The poetic language is plain spoken with short blunt phrases that are pidgin like; for example 'bunyip he finish'.

The effect of the humour and irony is a protest or challenge to the assumptions of the 'white' society that they could 'civilise' the blacks and improve their lives.

The poetic reference to 'red' is the Communist label that was the new 'monster' sought by Government .

'Abstract' refers to the rise of abstract expressionism seen in Jackson Pollock's artwork that the poet judges as inferior to their own cave paintings.

The reverends or ministers responsible for rounding up half caste aboriginal children into mission schools and stations are compared to a white witch doctor. The weapons of indigenous Australia, the woomera (extender for the spear to throw further) and the waddy (a war club) are compared to the apparently civilised atom bomb.

### *We are Going*

This poem is prose that is 16 lines in length.

The message of the poem is one of loss and regret. The old ways are gone and scattered, the animals have abandoned the sacred space and the old warriors

no longer belong. Their connection to land has been severed through the arrival of 'white' Australia.

Visual Imagery paints a picture of a magical past connected to the land 'we are the lightning bolt, we are the quiet daybreak'. The strangers are 'shadow ghosts' linked to the past but not belonging to the present.

White men are compared with ants and strangers.

The language is lyrical and whimsical, haunting and descriptive – no pidgin English here. There is irony in the statement 'rubbish may be tipped here' which suggests white man's total misunderstanding of the ceremonial importance of the site. The effect of this language and subject is to produce regret in the reader.

### **Australian Curriculum Grade 7**

#### *Content descriptors*

- Creating literature '*create literary texts that adapt stylistic features encountered in other texts eg stanza, juxtaposition*' and '*experiment with text structures and language features and their effects in creating literary texts eg rhythm, layout, colour*
- Creating texts '*plan draft and publish imaginative informative and persuasive texts, selecting aspects of subject matter and particular language visual and audio features to convey information and ideas*'
- Responding to Literature '*reflect on ideas and opinions about characters, setting and events in literary texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others and justifying a point of view*'