



## Writers on the Road

**The artists consulted with elders to find a significant local story then worked with students to retell the story in the form of illustrated books and a mural.**

**The Partnership** Mark Greenwood and Frané Lessac work both as a team and individually and have written, illustrated and published a large number of children's books ([www.artbeatpublishers.com](http://www.artbeatpublishers.com)). Writers on the Road is an initiative of writing WA, the peak body for writing and associated activities in WA ([www.writingwa.org](http://www.writingwa.org)).

**Wanarn Remote Community School** is located approximately 1100km from Kalgoorlie. This community is part of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Area which sits within the Central Desert Region of Western Australia. Wanarn Community is home to the Ngaanyatjarra Tribe. Wanarn Community School has a specific focus on the visual arts as part of the whole school program.

**The Project** Writers on the Road (WOTR) is a state-wide, education-based arts development program that has been delivered on an annual basis since 1996. In 2006, author Mark Greenwood and artist Frané Lessac travelled to a number of Ngaanyatjarra Lands communities as part of a WOTR tour. Resident in Wanarn for five days, Mark and Frané worked with students and other members of the local community to develop a storytelling/mural project from a traditional Wanarn story that was painted on the wall of the Wanarn shop.

**You often see kids pointing at the mural or reading it with a big stick, modelling reading behaviour.** Jill Millar, Principal

**The Process** There is no written English anywhere in the Wanarn community and English is the students' second language. "Apart from in the shop, there are no signs or standard English anywhere, so that people often don't even know what they are buying. So it's important to make English visible", explained Jill Millar, Principal.

Mark and Frané worked with elders to determine the focus of the project, settling upon the Crow and Cockatoo story, which had never before been written down. Accompanied by an elder, the artists visited Cockatoo Rock and other important local sites. Mark crafted the story after discussion with the students and elders. He involved students in the process of how an author brings a story idea from a "sloppy copy" to a polished draft. Students worked in teams with Mark and Frané to create illustrated versions of these books, making laminated copies at the end for each student. The artists described the process: "At Wanarn we discussed the process of writing and illustrating picture books and explained the development of a storyline and the stages involved in preparing for publication. We displayed drafts, sketches, photographs, research and reference notes, original artwork and demonstrated that books have their beginnings in the imagination". Jill continued: "The students took pride in the books and were engaged in reading them on the last day. They were

delighted to have them. None were left behind at school, they were really engaged in telling their parents and other people about the story".

The second part of the project was a large mural drafted by Frané and inspired by the artists' research and the students' illustrations. The mural was painted on the shop wall by participants with help, advice and positive feedback from most of the community. A DVD of stills from all stages of the project was edited to music and shown to the community.

The community had never painted this story before and Mark and Frané's visit has inspired a range of new work from the community around the crow and the cockatoo. The project also achieved its key objective: "Students are often seen reading the script on the wall, looking at the details and discussing the story, the mural is a talking point for locals and visitors alike", concluded Jill.

Writers on the Road receives funding from Country Arts WA and is sponsored by Healthway to promote the Smarter Than Smoking message. The Wanarn project also received support from the school through the Priority Country Area Program.

**It's the first artist-in-residence since I've been here ... The ultimate outcome was raised esteem in the community, as it went beyond the boundaries of the school. Other people don't come into the school much so it was good to take the project out. The government's plan for education here is to engage community and art is a great way of doing that.** Jill Millar, Principal

### Tips

Permissions are required from Indigenous elders to share stories or utilise images of cultural significance. "Quoting" others' work is an acceptable part of current arts practice but sensitivity should be bought to bear on a project with Indigenous content. Artists and organisers should refer to community leaders and national guidelines for protocols regarding the use of Indigenous themes and content, for example the Australia Council for the Arts' Visual Cultures - Protocols for Producing Indigenous Australian Visual Arts and Craft, available from the Australia Council's website at [www.ozco.gov.au/arts\\_resources/publications/visual\\_cultures/](http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_resources/publications/visual_cultures/)

While it didn't occur at Wanarn, a family funeral can interrupt the scheduled activities at an Indigenous community for several days. Flexibility is needed to implement a residency that suits the community and the project.



Main and Inset Images: Students painting murals for the Writers on the Road Mural Project at Wanarn Remote Community School. Artists: Frané Lessac and Mark Greenwood. Photographer: Frané Lessac