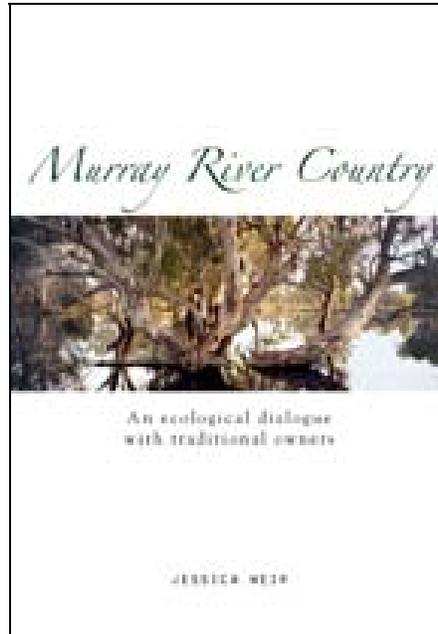


Teachers' Notes: *Murray River Country*

Aboriginal Studies Press



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MURRAY RIVER COUNTRY

TEACHERS' NOTES

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Introduction to the teachers' notes

The text

Weir, J. K., *Murray River Country; An ecological dialogue with traditional owners*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2009.

These teachers' notes have been developed for teachers interested in engaging students in the current debate about the future of Australia's Murray river. The text occupies an interesting space between science and the humanities, making it suitable for study in a range of disciplines – from geographical and environmental sciences through to history, media and thematic studies in English.

Presenting the author

Dr Jessica Weir is a geographer who works in the fields of ecology and sociology in Australia. Dr Weir has conducted extensive research on the ecological devastation resulting from centuries of mismanagement and misunderstanding of the land and waters incorporated in the Murray-Darling Basin. She is also active in developing theories and research methodologies to support the work of the Ecological Humanities group.

Dr Weir hopes to take readers beyond the superficial solutions proposed by government. The health of the river is not merely dependent upon our returning of water to the system. The complex interactions of the world beyond the river must also be considered. This can best be achieved, Weir argues, by viewing the water crisis from the perspective of Indigenous Australians who have intimate connections to the affected ecosystems.

Traditional knowledge can help us gain new perspectives on how to approach the healing of the Murray River and the agricultural heartland of this country. How we think about the natural world informs the actions we take. And the Aboriginal nations of the Murray-Darling Basin have so much to offer in terms of real solutions because, through ancient tradition and life experiences, they have a truer understanding of the Murray River's ecology than an emotionally and spiritually detached city-based government could ever hope to have.

How to use these notes

Teachers are encouraged to use this program as a thematic study in Geography, History or Aboriginal Studies. The notes present a guided study of the text and the issues it raises, beyond geographical and ecological concerns. There is sufficient work to fill around 20 lessons. A combination of resource sheets guide students through a detailed study of each chapter. They are composed of useful commentaries and a wide range of activities including fieldwork, group projects, an oral task, ICT tasks and independent research. The sheets are fully reproducible and are designed for students to complete in class time. Some are suitable for homework or extension work. Teachers are invited to photocopy the sheets for use by individual students in the classroom. Some tasks may be completed on the worksheet while others are provided for completion in students' work books or on loose paper. The resource sheets can be used as individual studies or together in an extended program of study.

Links to syllabus learning outcomes

This document includes tables providing teachers with specific links to NSW Board of Studies syllabus outcomes for Stage 5 Geography. The program described here has been tailored to meet the learning outcomes of **Focus Area 5A2: Changing Australian Communities** – (*Ways in which communities in Australia are responding to change*). Another option for teachers of Stage 5 is to use the program for **Focus Area 5A3: Issues in Australian Environments** (*Ways in which geographical understanding contributes to the sustainable management of issues affecting the Australian environment*). Fieldwork skills are utilised in the program, with opportunities for students to develop their own Research Action Plan and practice geographical research skills and techniques in their local area.

The resource sheets can be adapted to suit the syllabus requirements for equivalent year levels in the other Australian states. As well as meeting the specific outcomes listed

in the Stage 5 Geography syllabus, the program is also useful for teachers implementing the new Australian Curriculum, which has as a cross-curriculum priority the aim of exploring Aboriginal Australians' perspectives throughout various courses.

Provisions for extension work

To supplement this program, suggestions are provided for extension tasks that will challenge students to practise more advanced fieldwork and geographical research skills. There are also a number of opportunities for students to engage in challenging discussions and debates.

Provisions for students with learning difficulties

Students with special learning needs may be assigned more reading time before they embark on the fieldwork activities. They may elect to work in partnerships with peers or a learning support teacher. The more challenging lessons can be broken down into simpler steps, and can be refocused on the development of oral responses rather than formal writing tasks. This will help enable students with learning difficulties to achieve the learning outcomes of the program.

Specific language considerations

Indigenous Australians prefer to be identified by a language label. For example, using the expression 'Yorta Yorta woman' makes it clear to which specific language group the person belongs. The terms 'Aboriginal people' and 'Indigenous people' have passed into accepted usage despite their originally generic meanings. To distinguish these terms as proper nouns naming cultural groups, it is important that they are capitalised when they appear in written language. It is appropriate to seek to properly define distinct and individual nations and peoples when making reference to Indigenous Australians.

It is important that teachers deal authentically with topics relying on the life experiences of Indigenous Australians. The intensely personal and emotive topics that dominate Aboriginal literature call for sensitivity and cross-cultural empathy. Subconscious deference to stereotypes and misconceptions can be avoided through proper listening to and contextualising of Aboriginal writing and storytelling.

Preparation and reading plan

Teachers will need to provide sufficient copies of the book, *Murray River Country* for each student to have their own copy if reading is to be assigned for homework (as prescribed in this program). Teachers should also photocopy the required worksheets from the teachers' notes document before each lesson.

Chapters 1 and 2 would be best presented to students in a whole-class, guided reading style. They introduce readers to the artificial separation that 'moderns' have made between the natural world and human culture. These introductory chapters prepare the groundwork for readers to explore alternative narratives and philosophical approaches to ecology. Students can then proceed through the book with a firm grasp of the facts about the character and condition of the Murray river as it is today.

Assessment plan

A Fieldwork booklet is included to guide students through various skills-based geographical tasks. A number of the resource sheet activities can be used as the basis for major assignments in this unit. The Fieldwork Booklet activities may also be used for assessment purposes.

Unit summary

This is an overview of the teaching and learning stages in this unit. The resource sheets are designed to be used in the order presented here, though teachers may use them at their discretion. Supporting documents are also provided to assist teachers in programming.

Week 1	Introducing the text
	Presenting the author
	Reading Chapters 1 and 2
	Resource sheet 1 Facts about the geography of the Murray
	Resource sheet 2 Key problems with the Murray

Week 2	Reading Chapter 3 Resource sheet 3 Threatened habitats Commence working through Fieldwork Booklet
Week 3	Reading Chapter 4 Resource sheet 4 Communities in crisis Continue working through Fieldwork Booklet
Week 4	Reading Chapters 5 & 6 Resource sheet 5 Ecological dialogue Resource sheet 6 Revision of key facts and issues Complete Fieldwork Booklet

An additional week could be allocated for major assignment work, or to enable students to complete a fieldwork research task in greater depth.

Learning outcomes (NSW Board of Studies Stage 5 Geography syllabus)

In the following tables, the learning outcomes addressed by this program are shown in the order that they are presented in the syllabus document. Outcomes that are not applicable have been deleted.

Resource sheet 1 Facts about the geography of the Murray

- The Murray is Australia's longest river at 2375 kilometres.
- It rises in the Australian Alps, and forms the border between New South Wales and Victoria.
- The Murray is part of the vast Murray-Darling Basin system, which covers an area of over one million square kilometres – a seventh of the land mass of the Australian continent.

- The Murray empties into the Southern Ocean near Goolwa, South Australia.
- The waters flow through Lake Alexandrina and The Coorong, where it acquires a lot of salt.
- The mouth of the river has always been fairly shallow, despite the high volume of water that periodically flows through to the ocean.
- Major settlements along the river include:
 - Albury/Wodonga (New South Wales and Victoria); Echuca, Swan Hill, Mildura and Barmah (Victoria); Renmark, Murray Bridge, South Australia
- The river is the habitat of a variety of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, crustaceans, trees and shrubs.

Resource sheet 2 Key problems with the Murray

Key health problems with the Murray River

- severely reduced water volume and flow
- dryland salinity due to reduced water flows
- minimal flow-through power for the water to cross the mouth to the sea
- siltation due to forced changes in erosion and deposition trends
- disrupted flood patterns
- disrupted breeding cycles and destroyed breeding grounds
- toxic blue-green algae blooms
- endangered or extinct species
- chemical pollution from run-off caused by agricultural activities
- artificially engineered alteration (reversal) in the wet and dry seasons
- serious environmental damage to river banks
- loss of river red gum forests
- drowning of wetlands and other dry land habitats

Causes

- long-term historical interference from European settlers
- mismanagement by river regulators
- extreme and prolonged drought
- introduction of destructive species, including pests like the carp (*Gambusia*) and various trout species
- the removal of 'snags' (fallen trees in the water) to accommodate shipping
- the diversion of water for supply to towns and farms
- changes to flows and route of water from the construction of locks, weirs, dams and bridges
- the building of reservoirs, including the Snowy Mountain Hydroelectric Scheme infrastructure
- use of chemical pollutants in agriculture

Resource sheet 3 Threatened habitats

1 Complete the tables by listing all the known species that are found in the Murray River region today. Note: You may include introduced species. Begin your research by using the index of the book, *Murray River Country*.

waterbirds	crustaceans	molluscs	freshwater fish

mammals	reptiles	birds	amphibians

2 Select ONE species that belongs to one group listed below and complete the following activities.

- a) Describe the species – its appearance, habitat, behaviour, breeding patterns, relationships with other organisms in its ecosystem

- b) Describe the condition that the species is currently in – extinct, endangered, affected by illness or mutation, over-abundant (a pest)

- c) Suggest possible outcomes for other species in the food web of which this species is part

Resource sheet 4 Communities in crisis

Murray River Country sets out the problems of river health in a way that moves us beyond the question of returning water to the river, forcing us to re-examine our wider priorities – not just for this river, but in relation to the natural world in general. In seeking solutions, it is wise to listen to the people who lived successfully in harmony with the Murray for thousands of years.

Archaeological evidence suggests that some Aboriginal people living along the Murray in times past were settled in a kind of village life. This challenges the idea that they were all semi-nomadic.

1 Which view does the book support? Discuss your ideas with the class.

The current 'wisdom' being offered to solve the issues of salinity and diminishing water volume in the river system centres on how much water should be 'returned' to the river. This notion betrays a certain ignorance and arrogance among those who believe they manage and control the river today. The only 'management' that has occurred has been at the expense of nature, for the gain of the managers. Had their management been aimed at finding a balance between their own needs and those of the ecosystems that rely on the river, there would be no crisis. Intervening authorities fail to see the irony that further 'management' decisions will not bring about the result they desire – a subdued natural force that bends to the will and economic whims of people who depend upon its resources for their very survival.

2 What do you think of the solution proposed by the government to buy 'back water' from the agriculturalists who depend on supplies from the Murray River? Discuss your ideas in a small group, then present an oral summary of the group's conclusions to the class.

3 Do some further research on one of the Aboriginal nations mentioned in *Murray River Country*. Investigate the question of whether they led a settled or nomadic lifestyle.

4 In what ways could the communities that rely on the Murray today benefit from listening to the stories of the surviving members of these people groups? How could they be led to a better understanding of the past, present and future of the river system?

Resource sheet 5 Ecological dialogue

Murray River Country offers students the opportunity to view the ecological issues comprising the Murray River debate from the perspective of Aboriginal people. The

people whose traditional country is impacted by the deteriorating health of the river system have told their stories and presented their views in a way that foregrounds the interests of the river as a life entity in itself.

The stories that spring from Australia's agricultural heartland bring vitality to the discussion about the Murray River. Intercultural perspectives sideline the ecological issues and bring to the foreground the philosophical, ethical and cultural considerations that should have underpinned decision-making since the earliest times of European intervention.

However, in the public arena, Indigenous voices are not being heard. In the news, the social, political, economic and ecological debate stops far short of this approach. It is in their unique personifying of the river that Aboriginal stakeholders contribute most powerfully to the discussion. They conceptualise the land, waters, wildlife and human inhabitants as interdependent for literal survival, not mere economic survival.

Jessica Weir turns the parameters of the debate inside out, challenging Western notions of what water is, what it means to manage it, and what it represents for our past, present and future. Only by starting from a position of understanding the connectivity of land, waters and people, she argues, can we begin to propose workable solutions. Weir emphasizes that the connections between living things have not been acknowledged in the public debate.

The 'moderns' (as she terms the power brokers and Western stakeholders) insist on approaching the issue from a dualistic point of view that sharply divorces nature ('the wild') and humans from their natural interconnectedness. Our tendency to want to 'subdue' and dominate, to exploit the natural world and its resources, keeps us focused on economic factors, 'rights' and the forcible assertion of our arbitrarily determined priorities over others – always at the expense of living things that we wish to control.

Resource sheet 6 Revision of key facts and issues**Chapters 1 and 2**

- 1 Summarise the changes to The Coorong that are described by Matt and Pete Rigney. (Refer to *Murray River Country*, pp 1-3)
- 2 Describe the difference between the thinking of the 'moderns' and Aboriginal people who have connections to the river. (Refer to *Murray River Country*, pp 3-7)
- 3 What impressions of government regulators are given by the diagram on page 8?
- 4 How do the ties of Aboriginal people to 'country' enable them to have an intimate knowledge of their home regions? (pp 11-14)
- 5 In what ways does Jessica Weir suggest we need to change in terms of how we think about resources? (pp 17-21)
- 6 Discuss the ideas presented on pages 24-5 in the section headed 'Ecology and Economy'.
- 7 Create a dot point summary of the water management issues described on pages 26-8.
- 8 Read pages 29-37 and make a diagram that shows the interconnectedness of the flora and fauna species mentioned.
- 9 List FOUR historical interferences with the river that have contributed to the current problems. (pp 31- 37)
- 10 Choose ONE of the following quotes and make an extended personal response, in essay form:

The governments believe they are involved in a very large plumbing exercise. p 42

River health is the unfortunate sacrifice we have to make for food production, export earnings and the life of country towns. p 43

Water trading keeps the focus on water as a commodity. p 45

Chapters 3 and 4

- 1 What are 'situated knowledges'? (Refer to p 49)
- 2 Summarise the perspectives of Richard and Agnes (p 51).
- 3 In what way does Weir interpret Lee's prophecy that the Yorta Yorta people will die if the river dies? (p 61)

4 According to Weir, the 'moderns' way of thinking stops the process of negotiation before it starts. Discuss. (p 67)

Chapters 5 and 6

1 What is MILDRIN?

2 Discuss the validity of ONE proposed solution outlined on pages 118-122.

FIELDWORK BOOKLET

In Geography, fieldwork is completed 'in the field'. This means 'outside the classroom'. In this study, fieldwork could be conducted at sites on and around the Murray River or any river that is local to your school. Substitute the name of your local river for the word 'Murray' in the following activities.

Planning fieldwork

The aim of this fieldwork is to answer questions about the Murray River's ecological condition. As you plan it, list any resources you may need, using the following headings:

Primary data

Secondary sources

1 After studying their sources, geographical researchers write some focus questions. Use these common words of inquiry to help you frame some research questions.

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

How?

Who?

2 In your workbook, answer these investigative questions, framed on the **'what'** word of inquiry:

What is the issue to be investigated?

What is the main research question to be answered?

What is my hypothesis?

What type of data do I need to collect?

What techniques will I use to collect the data?

Data collection methods

When you have identified the type of information required, you need to decide how it can be collected. Later, you will also need to consider some options for **data processing methods** - in other words, how the data will be organised and analysed. Finally, you will need to decide how you will present the fieldwork findings.

Students conducting fieldwork gather information in various ways, including:

- taking measurements
- collecting and analysing samples
- counting things
- making calculations
- recording raw data
- making observations
- surveying people
- referring to secondary sources (including previous research)

3 List EIGHT specific activities that you could do to conduct fieldwork on the topic of the Murray River. Write them in the spaces below.

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

4 Discuss which THREE of the suggested activities would be the easiest to achieve in practise for students of Geography at your school.

Types of fieldwork

Geographers can use certain tools and activities to collect data about the Murray River. One group of fieldwork activities is the taking of measurements. This might involve collecting samples, creating maps, counting specimens of a particular kind. Fieldwork is

followed up with analysis work. Compiling data enables geographers to develop useful statistics that can be presented to help explain what is happening to the Murray River. They can also help us predict events that may occur in the future and assess the likely impact of those events.

Circle True or False for each of the following statements:

5 Gathering people's opinions is a fieldwork activity. TRUE or FALSE

6 One way in which people's opinions can be collected is through a survey questionnaire. TRUE or FALSE

7 Interviews cannot be part of a research study design. TRUE or FALSE

When we conduct research that involves human beings, we must obey certain rules that help ensure the people are treated fairly. This is called 'ethics' in research.

8 Research ethics requires that researchers 'do no harm' in the course of collecting, interpreting, analysing and presenting data they have gathered. In what ways could research surveys or interviews potentially do harm to the subjects of a study?

9 What ethical considerations need to be taken into account when surveying or interviewing research subjects from Aboriginal nations?

Fieldwork helps geographers:

- Describe relationships between things.
- Classify things, through making observations and recording them
- Take measurements to determine weather and climate patterns

Meteorological fieldwork techniques are used to observe, analyse and forecast the weather. Rain gauges, barometers, thermometers and satellite photography are all useful tools that enable geographers to do this.

Writing	
Summarising	
Comparing	

12 Imagine you need to trace the original path of a stream or creek feeding into the Murray that dried up in the 1950s. Suggest THREE ideas for starting points to gather data.

13 What are some topics that may arise when studying town planning and population management in the inland regions through which the Murray River flows?

14 Suggest appropriate data collection methods for each of the following research studies:

a Determining population growth figures in Echuca over the past year

b Investigating water pollution caused by a chemical spill into the Murray River

c Assessing the risk to human life posed by a bushfire on the banks of the Murray

15 Explain how you could use photography to monitor changes in a specific area of the banks of the Murray over a six month period.

Organising, analysing and presenting research data

After fieldwork has been conducted to collect geographical data, the information needs to be organised. Data must be analysed so that patterns can be detected.

16 List SIX information technology tools (computer, communications and audio-visual) that could be used to present research data.

Drawing conclusions

When fieldwork has been completed, researchers should interpret the findings and draw conclusions about the investigation.

17 Why might fieldwork need to be repeated in some situations?

Geographers provide certain groups with information about their research findings. In the case of the Murray River, studies have provided numerous stakeholders with research findings that reveal the pitiful state of the ecosystems surrounding the river.

18 Summarise the response of ONE key figure from one of the following categories of respondents:

- governments
- Aboriginal people whose country is being affected
- Murray-dependent farmers
- individuals
- organisations
- the general public

What is a research action plan?

A research action plan is developed in eight stages.

Step 1 - Identify the aim of the research study.

Step 2 -Write some focus questions to be addressed.

Step 3 - Identify the primary and secondary data needed to answer the focus questions.

Step 4 – Select methods to be used in collecting the data.

Step 5 - Methodically collect the primary and secondary data.

Step 6 - Organise and analyse the collected data.

Step 7 - Select methods of presentation for the research findings.

Step 8 - Draw conclusions, make a plan and take action in response to the findings.

19 Write a research action plan that you could implement to investigate ONE aspect of the Murray River debate. Complete this task in your workbook.

20 In what ways could you use the text *Murray River Country* as a secondary resource? Discuss your ideas.

Fieldwork Booklet Answers

1 *Answers will vary.*

2 *Answers will vary.*

3 *Answers will vary.*

4 *Answers will vary.*

5 *True*

6 *True*

7 *False*

8 *Misrepresent what people say; create negative or unwanted public attention.*

9 *Undervalue their concerns and special connection with the issue; fail to respect the spiritual and cultural significance of the information provided which may not be approved for release; incite prejudice because the research is specific to a single cultural group.*

10 *Use a rain gauge to collect rainfall. Measure the contents. These represent the average amount of rain in millimetres that fell in the area during a specified time frame. Take measurements every 6 hours using a rain gauge to obtain rainfall figures. The data could be presented in various ways, including as a table of measurements, perhaps showing the average rainfall (the total of the figures obtained over 24 hours divided by*

11 *Suggested responses: observing how much of the water's surface area is covered by the algae, recording the tidal markings, writing about other types of flora present in and around the water; summarising the apparent damage to fish habitats caused by the algae; comparing - looking at secondary sources to compare findings; comparing the research zone with a similar area that was unaffected by the algae.*

12 *Locate people who saw the stream; use public records to find people who owned or currently own land in the vicinity; conduct internet searches about the topic; use satellite photographs and look for old beds; conduct library research; look through local council records; take soil samples at the site; do field sketches and compare them with old photographs.*

13 *May include rural to urban migration patterns, population density, resource supply and demand, sustainable use of resources, patterns and preferences in accommodation, assessment of infrastructure's suitability, topographical surveys and diagrams of proposed developments.*

14 a Use a census to take counts at the beginning and end of the year and compare the totals; b take water samples from the river and conduct chemical analysis; c use a topographic map marked with current data on the progress and path of the fire, and make predictions based upon its behaviour under similar or worse conditions (wind, air temperature, incline of land).

15 Taking before and after photographs. The researcher could take photographs of the river from exactly the same locations and angles each day/week/month for a period of six months. These could then be compared, using tracings and overlays, or digital imaging, to determine the type and rate of change.

16 PowerPoint presentations, word processing documents, spread sheets, data bases, DVD presentations, audio recordings, photo or video files, graphs, charts and tables, web pages, email content, e-publishing, CD-ROMs, blogs, social networking sites and digital file sharing sites.

17 In order to show that the original research findings are still accurate; to test the same hypothesis in a new setting; to resolve conflicting results from other studies; because the research did not result in reliable conclusions. When a study didn't reach a satisfactory conclusion and the research questions were not answered.

Additional resources

Ecological humanities

<http://www.ecologicalhumanities.org/index.html>

Clean Up the Murray River: Teacher's Notes - FUSE – Dept. of Education, Vic. 1 Jul 2009

<Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.>

River Murray Waterwatch education sessions. 15 Aug 2008

<www.murrayusers.sa.gov.au/RMUUC.../resources.htm resourceswaterwatch.org.au>

A river ran through it - Part 1 What has happened to the Murray River?

www.waylink-english.co.uk/?page=21540

Official Murray River Tourism Website

<murrayriver.com.au>

Total travel - the Murray River

<au.totaltravel.yahoo.com/destinations/.../goulburnmurray/>

Murray River Visitor Guide

<www.murrayrivervisitorguide.com.au/>

A trip along the River Murray (1925 clip 1)

<aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/trip-along-river-murray/clip1/?nojs>

Two Men in a Tinnie (DVD)

<[www.gtav.asn.au/Resources/.../Murray.../Two Men Tinnie.pdf](http://www.gtav.asn.au/Resources/.../Murray.../Two_Men_Tinnie.pdf)>

River Murray Urban Users Local Action Planning Committee Inc.

Teachers' Notes and Activity Sheets. 2000.

<nrmeducation.net.au/uploads/Resources/library_murray_darling.pdf>

Downstream: The River Murray in South Australia, Teachers' Kit, 2004.

<www.slsa.sa.gov.au/murray/DownstreamPrim.pdf>

Blandowski's expedition to the Murray, 1857

<museumvictoria.com.au/pages/3711/blandowskis-expedition.pdf>

The Living Murray, Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre.

<www.wirraminna.org/projects/living-murray/>

Dreaming stories

<www.teachers.ash.org.au/jmresources/dreaming/stories.html>

Valuing heritage

<www.valuingheritage.com.au/SwanRiverColony/Impact_on_Aboriginal_People.html> -

Clean up the Murray River

<www.cleanup.org.au/files/clean_up_australia_flashgame_notes_sa.pdf>