

The background is a monochromatic blue-toned illustration. It depicts a landscape with several stylized trees and dense foliage. In the upper left, a person is sitting on a tree branch. In the upper center, another person is sitting on the ground, possibly working with objects. In the upper right, a person is standing and holding a large object. In the lower center, a person is standing with their back to the viewer. In the lower right, a traditional Aboriginal canoe is shown on the water. The entire scene is rendered in a fine-lined, woodcut-like style.

# The Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages



# **The Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages**

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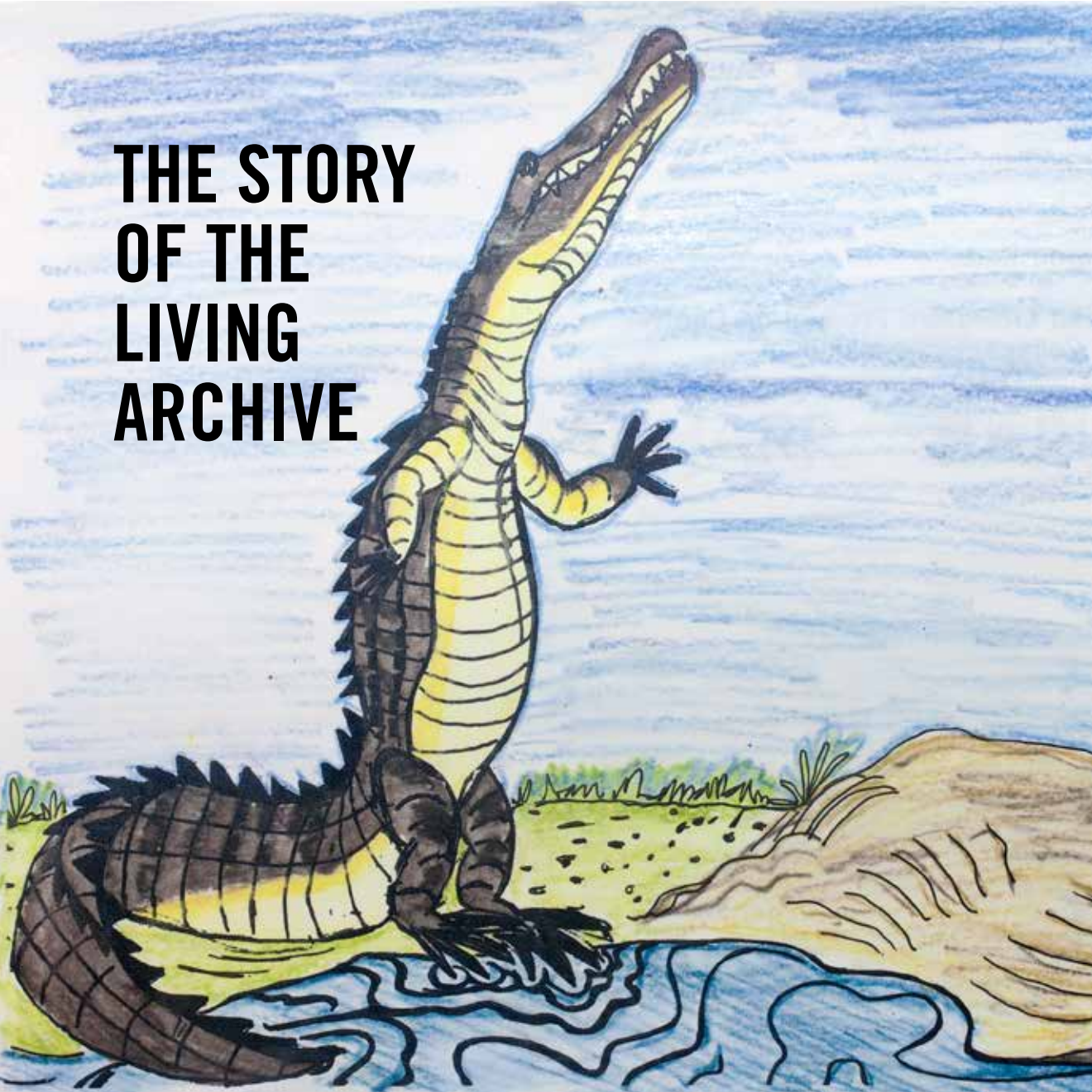
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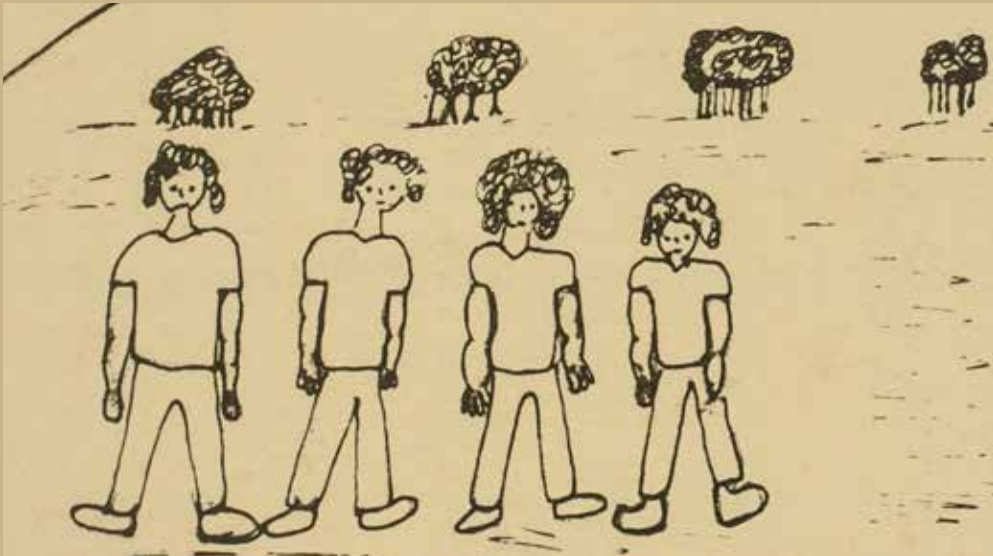
**THE STORY  
OF THE  
LIVING  
ARCHIVE**





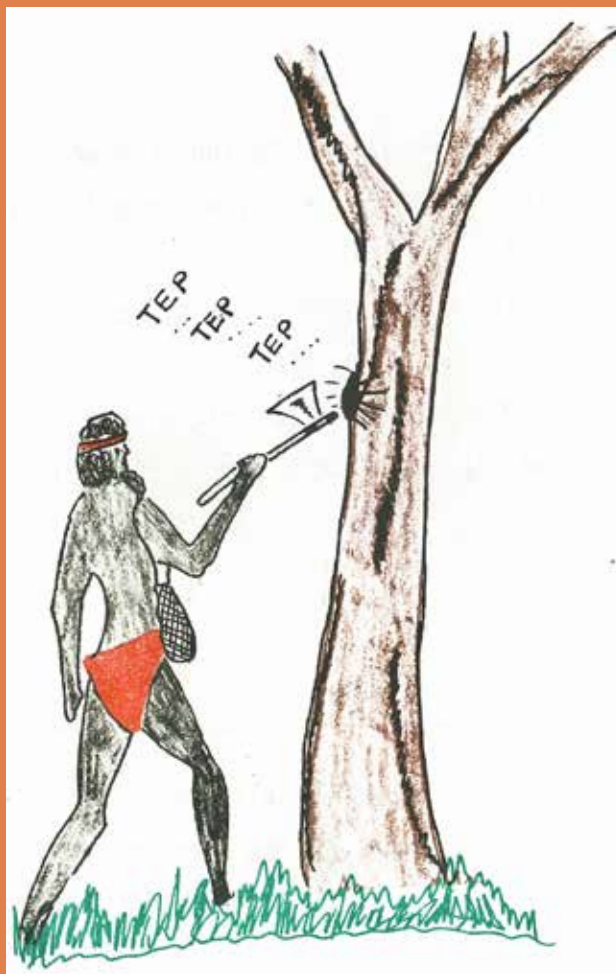
As the ancestors of Australia's first people moved over the land, singing and dancing, hunting and performing ceremonies, they left in place the many groups of people and their languages, their land forms, skies, water, plants, animals and sacred objects. Every place has its language, every language has its place. Over the years since colonisation many languages have been lost, and many are today spoken by only a handful of elderly people. Some are still thriving and being learnt by new generations of their owners, and others are being brought back to life.

In the early 1970s, the Australian Government introduced a program of bilingual education in a number of large remote Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory where children were growing up speaking their ancestral languages. In part this initiative followed the proven success of bilingual education elsewhere in the world, where the educational benefits of initial instruction in the mother tongue for children who spoke languages other than English in the home had been demonstrated to improve the academic outcomes. These transition bilingual-biliteracy programs were intended to help the children learn oral English while learning the basics of literacy through reading and writing their own languages. They would then move to English as the medium of instruction and to learning to read and write English.





In part, the introduction of bilingual education was also an acknowledgement of the right of Aboriginal children to education in their own languages. But many such children in remote NT communities were unable to benefit from a bilingual program, because there were too few speakers, or there were too many languages spoken in the community, or their languages lacked an agreed orthography. Bilingual education also represented an implicit acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of Aboriginal languages and their culture and knowledge practices to the wider world, an acknowledgement which, almost forty years later, led to funding for the development of the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages.





The bilingual programs, some of which have lasted for several decades, were accompanied by major efforts to develop vernacular literature in over thirty languages. “Flood the place with literature” was a recommendation of the report that led to the establishment of bilingual education. This entailed the costly processes of setting up and equipping local Literature Production Centres, and identifying, training and employing local literature workers, who worked with linguists and teacher-linguists, to produce books which were printed locally by literature production supervisors. The Literature Production Centres began the work of developing readers and primers through which young children (and often adults) could learn to read and write in their own languages. Producing these books entailed extensive linguistic analysis, determining the key vocabulary and grammatical forms used by children, and counting word and syllable frequencies to determine the most appropriate order in which to introduce sounds, syllables and words, then writing short amusing stories for beginning readers.

Developed as much for keeping culture and language strong as for teaching literacy, many books were based on local stories, told mostly by community elders – their histories, their environment and its resources, their ancestral heroes and tricksters. These books were often painstakingly transcribed and edited from audio recordings, and carefully illustrated. Many hours of work by groups of people went into producing a single book which was then printed on a local printing machine. Most editions were of around 100 copies, with light card covers, folded and stapled. They were used in the local school, or sent out to schools in other communities with the same language. Many communities also published a regular bilingual newspaper.





The work of bilingual education and literature production, along with a major drive to professionalise local Aboriginal teachers, meant that schools in many communities, especially those fortunate to have bilingual programs, were lively places, with teachers and community elders working productively together to develop what came to be known as 'both-ways education'. This went hand in hand with a policy of Aboriginalisation, often with community-led curriculum development and a corresponding change in the nature of the literature.

By the mid 1990s, things had begun to change. A new focus on academic achievement and national standardised testing led to changes in policy. Over time funding for bilingual programs was slowly reduced, and there was a swing back to English as the medium of instruction and the language for initial literacy.

Along with a reduced emphasis on remote Aboriginal teacher education, most of the Literature Production Centres and vernacular literacy programs were closed down. The readers and other books which had been produced in each community no longer had a significant place in the schools, and were often lost, destroyed, or put aside. Parents and grandparents continued the work of teaching the new generation their languages and culture – now often entirely outside the school grounds, and without the valuable support of the books.

While in many cases staff had tried to ensure that copies of books were deposited at the National Library of Australia, and sometimes also at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the books were becoming largely inaccessible to the communities which had laboured to produce them.

Within two decades, the vast corpus of literature which had never been brought into a single collection was in danger of being lost and forgotten by its owners.







A consortium of Charles Darwin University, the NT Department of Education and the Australian National University successfully applied for funding from the Australian Research Council to build an archive of as many of the books as could be found, scanned, turned into text and uploaded to the internet with the consent of their owners.

A team was set up to locate as many of the books as possible, find their writers or storytellers and illustrators (or their descendants, since many have now passed away) and ask their permission to make the books public. Another team worked on developing the digital repository and interfaces for the archive. Linguists and curriculum officers, Aboriginal teachers and ex-teachers, literacy workers and academics, library resource developers and many other people worked to develop the archive which is still growing.

The project has a focus on both the owners of the languages and culture who are teaching the new generations of young people, and on the wider world of students and researchers who are keen to understand and learn from Aboriginal knowledge authorities.

The material in the archive has been made available by its owners for use around the world by anyone who engages with it for study or recreation. The owners are committed to sharing their histories, their knowledge practices and their languages in good faith with interested people everywhere.



With the infrastructure of the archive in place, the second stage of the project involves expansion and engagement.

Materials in Indigenous languages by Indigenous authors from communities that did not have bilingual programs are being added to the archive. These include published and unpublished texts from various sources such as the School of Australian Languages, language centres and private collections.

Engagement happens at a number of different levels. At the community level, local knowledge and language authorities are invited and encouraged to supervise development and tailoring of their own collections, including producing talking books and other related items.

At the school level, archive resources are being incorporated into school programs to invigorate language and culture work in classrooms and communities and more widely across the Australian curriculum.

As an academic resource, the archive is connecting interested researchers worldwide with language authorities to explore, utilise and enrich the collection through collaborative research.





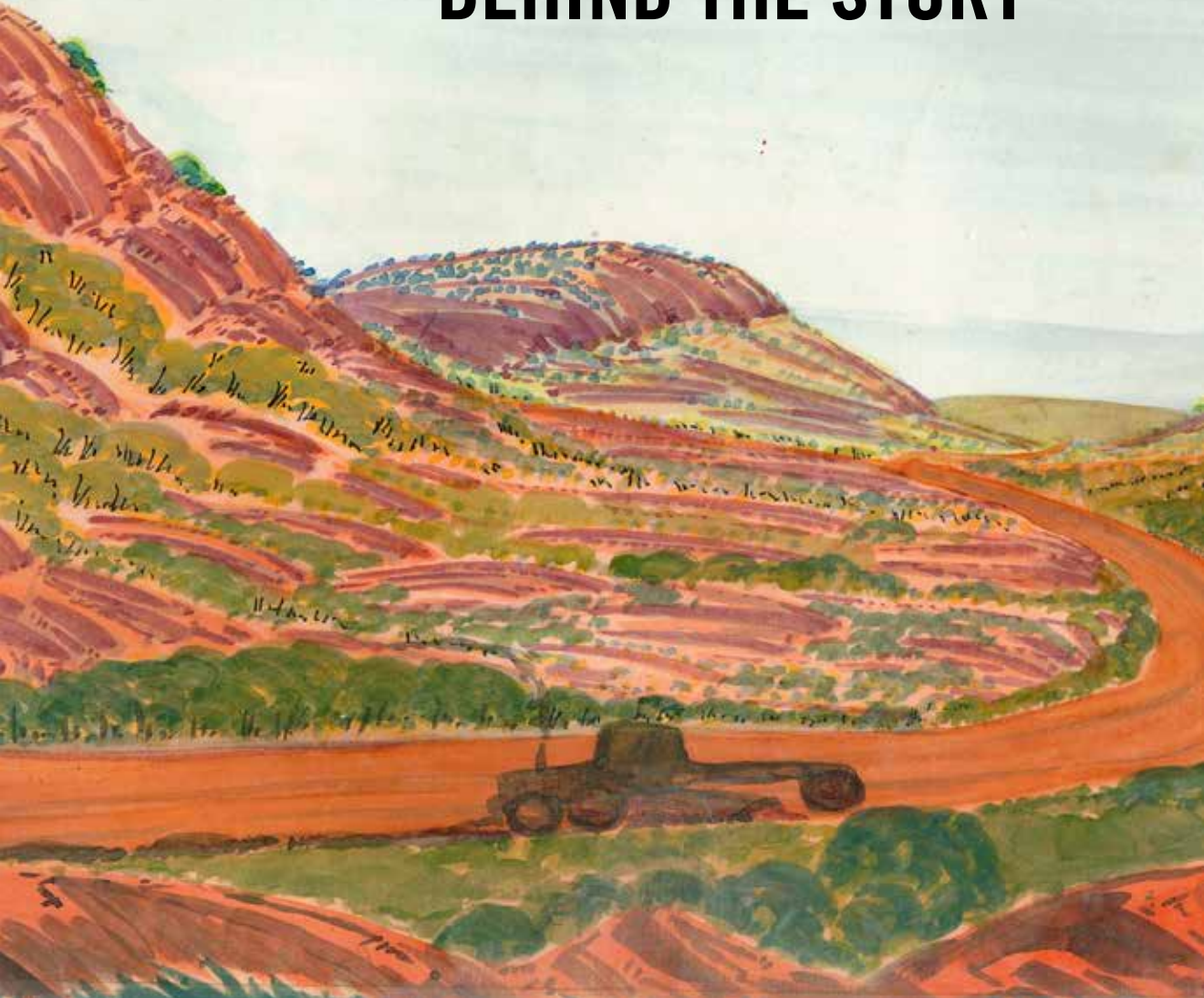
The Living Archive is available at [www.cdu.edu.au/laal](http://www.cdu.edu.au/laal)

The project team is keen to hear from people interested in contributing further material, editing and updating resources, collaborating with communities of origin, or improving the archive.

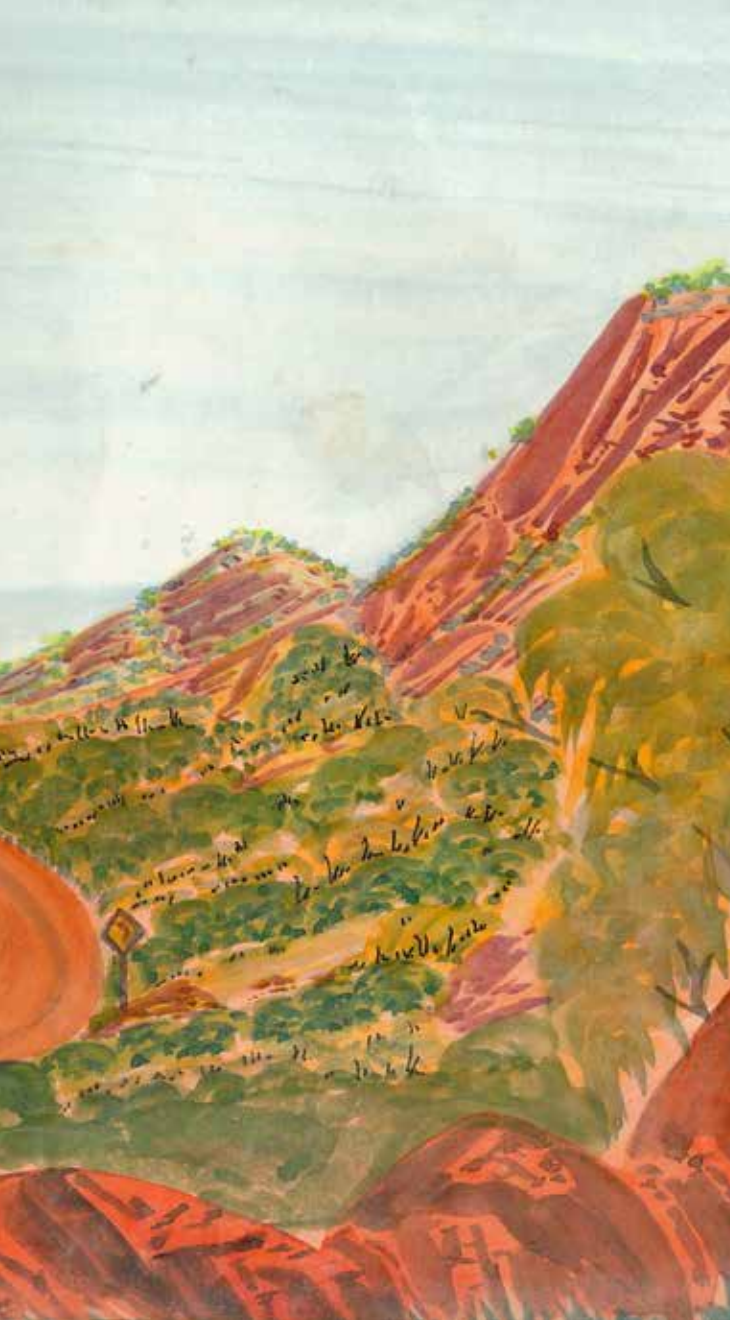
Contact [livingarchive@cdu.edu.au](mailto:livingarchive@cdu.edu.au)



# BEHIND THE STORY







The Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages is a product of a specific era when Australian languages were valued as an integral component of Indigenous education.

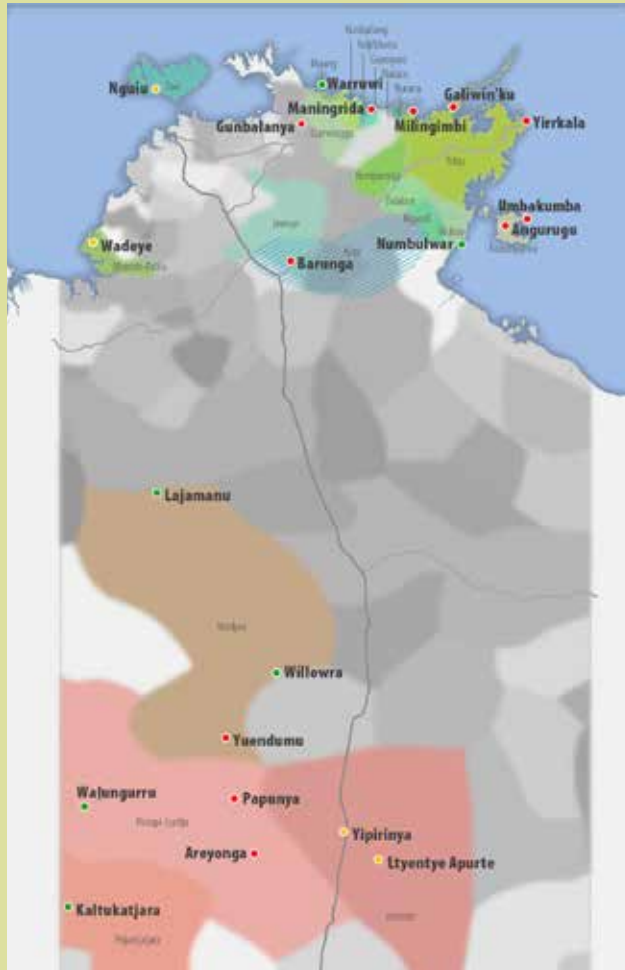
Although bilingual schools were affected by policy changes, staff developed innovative vernacular literacy programs incorporating local pedagogies and traditions.

The published materials exhibit a remarkable range of technologies in text, printing and illustration, evolving over four decades.

The move to digital technologies facilitates and encourages access and preservation, making these valuable materials available to a global audience.

## ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

When the colonisation of Australia began, there were over 250 distinct languages spoken, while today only around 50 continue to be learnt by young children. A majority are in the Northern Territory, and all are considered 'endangered' or at risk of dying out. 60% of Aboriginal people who speak an Aboriginal language live in the NT and 60% of Aboriginal people who live in the NT speak a traditional language at home. Many Australian languages now have standardised writing systems, which have enabled a rich literature to become accessible through the Living Archive.



The archive contains texts from both the 'Pama-Nyungan' family of Australian languages (for example the Yolŋu languages, Pitjantjatjara and Arrrente) and the non-Pama-Nyungan family (such as Tiwi, Anindilyakwa, Murrinh-patha). There are also hundreds of books in Kriol, an Aboriginal language which has developed across the cattle country of northern Australia since colonisation. Kriol uses many words borrowed from English, but with its own grammatical system. Many Aboriginal people speak a variety of different languages, including different varieties of English.

Aboriginal people have their own classification systems for languages. Within each group there can be small subdivisions of people and their places and languages. Sometimes languages look very similar to a linguist, but to an Aboriginal speaker they are always distinct because they belong to quite different parts of the land, different people, different ceremonial and totemic connections and different ancestral histories. Multilingualism is common, especially in places like the Yolŋu lands, where marriages must always take place between speakers of different languages.



In some places traditional languages are changing very quickly. Other languages have only a very few elderly speakers left. Some Aboriginal groups are working hard to keep their languages alive, and one of the aims of the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages is to be a useful resource for this work.

## BILINGUAL SCHOOLS

LOCATION	APPROXIMATE DATES	MAIN LANGUAGE	NO. OF BOOKS
Angurugu	1973 - 1979	Anindilyakwa	100
Areyonga	1973 - 2000s	Pitjantjatjara	150
Barunga	1976 - 1992	Kriol	350
Galiwin'ku	1974 - present	Djambarrpuyŋu	330
Gunbalanya (Oenpelli)	1974 - 1978	Kunwinjku	50
Ikuntji (Haasts Bluff)	1976 - 1992	Pintupi Luritja	
Kaltukatjara (Docker River)	1979 - 1998	Pitjantjatjara	70
Lajamanu	1982 - 2000s	Warlpiri	100
Ltyentye Apurte	1989 - present	Arrernte (Eastern)	150
M'Bunghara Homeland Centre	1981 - 1990	Pintupi Luritja	
Maningrida	1981 - 2000s	Burarra, Ndjébbana	400
Milingimbi	1973 - 2000s	Gupapuyŋu	250
Nguiu (Wurrumiyanga)	1974 - present	Tiwi	300
Ntaria (Hermannsburg)	1973 - 1975	Western Arrarnta	
Numbulwar	1976 - 1980, restarted 1990s	Wubuy (Nunggubuyu)	160

Not all bilingual schools had Literature Production Centres, however, many created and used language materials published at other schools. The numbers of books listed here are a rough estimate, as accurate figures are difficult to obtain.

<b>LOCATION</b>	<b>APPROXIMATE DATES</b>	<b>MAIN LANGUAGE</b>	<b>NO. OF BOOKS</b>
Nyirрпи	1986 - 1998	Warlpiri	
Papunya	1984 - 1996	Pintupi Luritja	250
Pularumpi (Garden Point)	1975 - 1977	Tiwi	
Umbakumba	1977 - 1982	Anindilyakwa	20
Wadeye	1976 - 1980, 1996 - present	Murrinh-Patha	250
Waḷungurru (Kintore)	1983 - 1998	Pintupi Luritja	50
Warruwi	1973 - 1998	Maung	350
Watiyawanu (Mt Liebig)	1987 - 1989	Pintupi Luritja	
Willowra	1977 - 2000s	Warlpiri	100
Yayayai	1974 - 1976	Pintupi Luritja	
Yipirinya	1983 - present	Arrernte, Warlpiri, Luritja	250
Yirrkala	1974 - present	Gumatj, Dhuwaya	320
Yuendumu	1974 - present	Warlpiri	300



## TIMELINE

- 1953 UNESCO landmark publication ‘The use of vernacular languages in education’ emphasises the importance of educating children in their mother-tongue
- 1960s Remote Aboriginal schools administered by the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration and Christian mission organisations
- 1964 The Watts-Gallacher Report advocates bilingual education as an ideal approach for the Northern Territory
- 1972 The Whitlam government transfers responsibility of all NT education to the new Commonwealth Department of Health and Education and announces the beginning of the NT bilingual programs
- 1974 Batchelor College is established and begins training Aboriginal Teacher aides. The School of Australian Linguistics opens as part of Darwin Community College
- 1979 The NT government takes over responsibility for Education
- 1980s Formal accreditation of bilingual programs, including biannual appraisals
- 1986 Bilingual Handbook is developed to explain the policy and practices of models of bilingual education, revised in 1995
- 1998 NT Government announces that bilingual education programs would be phased out in favour of the “further development of ESL programs”
- 2005 NT Department of Education resolves to “strengthen the bilingual program and improve its effectiveness and sustainability to deliver outcomes”

- 2009 Bilingual schools required to abandon first language teaching as “the first four hours of education in all Northern Territory schools will be conducted in English”
- 2012 A new Framework for Learning English as an Additional Language declared that “programs designed to deliver English literacy outcomes are inclusive of the students’ home/local language and culture as agreed with parents and communities”
- 2012 Australian Research Council provides funding for the Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages
- 2014 Stage II of the Living Archive funded by the Australian Research Council
- 2014 Draft review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory “does not support continued efforts to use biliteracy approaches, or to teach the content of the curriculum through first languages other than English”



## PEDAGOGICAL PRIMERS

Primers for teaching reading were in some programs based on the system devised by Sarah Gudschinsky for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. In this example produced around 1974 – lesson 47 of about 120 lessons in the Gupapuyŋu Readers series developed by Beulah Lowe at Milingimbi – the retroflexed sound ɭ is introduced in its syllable-final position through the word for clapstick – *biɭma*. The left hand page consists of a series of matrices using the ɭ in a variety of positions, and the right hand page uses the ɭ sound in many different ways to tell the very funny story of a girl saved from drowning by her dog. The many different syllable-final ɭ sounds in the story – *wirrkɭ* *young girl*, *gaypaɭ* *wattle*, *baɭ* *palyun crush*, *giɭyun lean over*, *biɭma clapstick*, *buɭ* *yun play*, *barryaɭ* *yun slip*, *ɖaɭ* *wirrirri'yun slide*, *guɭ* *wulyun sink*, *muɭ* *muɭ bubbles*, *ɭawuma bite*, *ɭaw* *maram lift up* – give clues as to what happened. This playing

with language has a strong tradition in Yolŋu humour. As times changed, so did pedagogy, and new methods – like ‘Words in colour’, ‘Breakthrough to literacy’, and ‘Language experience’ among many others, were introduced.

**Lesson 47**

Diagram 1: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

bi	pa	sa	wa
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 2: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 3: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 4: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 5: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 6: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 7: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

**Lesson 48**

Diagram 8: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

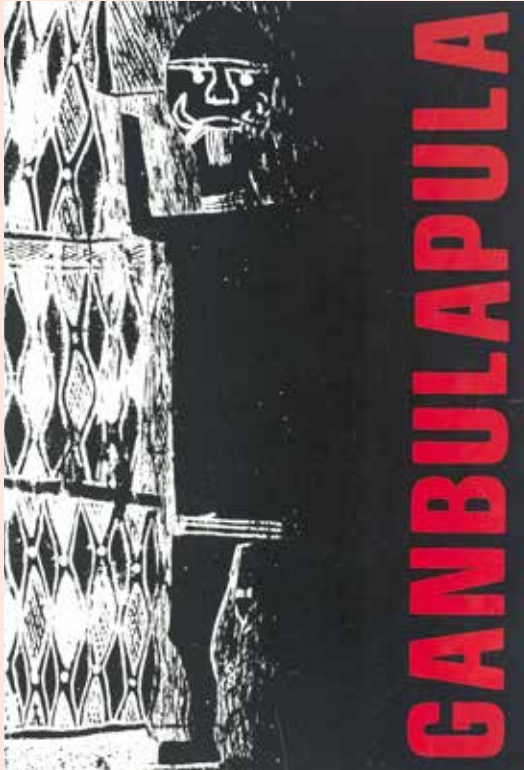
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

Diagram 9: A 2x2 grid of syllables: 

biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ
biɭ	paɭ	saɭ	waɭ

## **BOTH WAYS EDUCATION**

By the mid 1980s, many schools were developing 'both ways' curriculum and teaching practices, which involved interactions between western and traditional knowledge. In this example, in 1985, the most senior Gumatj clan elder took the Yirrkala post primary boys to the edge of the Gulḱuḱa escarpment and told



them the story of Ganbulapula. With the help of bark paintings from the school collection, and maps from the western traditions, the students learnt of the Gupapuyḱu hunter Murayana who killed a shark and then ran across the country all the way to Gulḱuḱa where he became the Gumatj hero. The students prepared a series of maps, stories, annotations and English translations to do with the land holdings and travels of both the hunter and the wounded shark, and the connections between the various groups that the journeys created. This is an early example of curriculum work being led by elders telling origin stories which inspired many classroom activities in local languages as well as English. Other versions can be found in the archive.

## TEXTS AND TECHNOLOGIES

In many cases, the books began as a story told by an elder, sometimes with the assistance of a bark painting or another artefact. Danyala from Milingimbi told children a story about their grandfather meeting some strangers he thought were their mothers' people, but who turned out to be ghosts and who then tried to steal a child. The story was recorded and then transcribed from tape by Mätjarra, a literacy worker.

	Mokuyyu linyalany gan nupar
Told by	Danyala
Tape 8	Wagan gayi, "Alhumany gi nhini. Ga <sup>ku</sup>
Side 2	Harrany dhu, <sup>ga bala</sup> marntjin maranydjalk <sup>n</sup>
Story 3	ni nläma'nlama, "bitjan gayi
No. 617	marimnu nheralana. mandanu

When the Literature Production Centres started, some of the books were printed from hand written originals ...

marntjina räli gäthuwala ga nathiwala,

... others from stencils ...

nhäjalana bärunha, naya gana norrana dhudinjura dharpanjura.

... or transfers...

**pitja tjuta palyanu,**



... or by a special typewriters:

nhinanan; ga garali' gayi mǎrragal ga

When computers were introduced in the late 1980s, custom fonts were prepared for the special characters in some languages, allowing output such as this:

Njurrunyɔja ŋunha ɔatjolanj wǎŋa. Waymamba

In the early 1970s much of the printing was done by the government printer in Darwin. Gradually, offset printing facilities were established in many Literature Production Centres, and by 1990 these were supplemented in the better equipped centres by colour printers and photocopiers. Print runs were limited, because books were intended for a limited local readership. Now many of the stories can be read on the internet through the Living Archive.

The wide variety of printing methods used to produce books resulted in a huge variability in text quality. In preparing books for the archive, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software is used to make a plain text file for each book. In this example, a clear line of text from an Arrernte book, which reads “*Re ikwere angkeke ‘Kele araye nhenhe*” when processed with OCR software comes out as “*R& iku/ere an^kekô Keie, arauje nkenke,*” so checking and correcting texts is a time-consuming task.



## GOING ONLINE

Rather than searching on library shelves, these materials can now be accessed through an online database hosted by Charles Darwin University Library. Every book in the archive has its own metadata – the name of the book, its author(s), illustrator, translator, key words for searching, when and where it was produced, and any other available information. Some books have detailed metadata, and some have almost none. Developing procedures to identify and categorise this information led to the production of detailed spreadsheets relating to different communities and languages. These were then mapped to appropriate fields which conformed to library standards and international linguistic standards, while also maintaining the integrity of the information provided in the book.

A key outcome of the project is to make the materials easily accessible to the general public, in particular for Indigenous users who may have limited reading skills and less familiarity with library catalogues. For this reason, a



developer was contracted to build a user-friendly interface which would access the metadata and materials from the digital repository and display them in a visual way. One pathway into the archive is through a map of language areas and communities of origin, another is to browse through a list of languages, places or people, or to search for particular words or names. The results show the covers of the books which can then be opened and read online or downloaded.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustrations were usually provided by artists within the local community. In the early days of bilingual programs, multi-colour printing was technically unfeasible, so most books were produced in black and white, with single colour cardboard covers. In the top end, bark paintings were the basis for many illustrations, while in the desert sand drawing and body-paint designs were used. The books in the Living Archive collection contain illustrations ranging from simple line drawings to detailed hand-painted images and digitally enhanced graphics. The illustrations included in this book are representative of this wide variety of techniques.



## INDEX OF IMAGES

Cover: from a Djambarrpuyŋu reader, artist Waḍaymu, Galiwin'ku, 1981.

p2-3: from *Djaŋŋarr Bāru* (Hungry Crocodile), artist uncredited, Galiwin'ku, 1998.

p4: from *Nakodjok, Naburlanj, Kanjok dja Kokok birriwam kurrulum*, artist uncredited, Oenpelli, 1981.

p5: from *Bifo Langa Drimtain* (Before the dreamtime), artist Ross Tukumba, Barunga 1981.

p6: from *Anu Ngurrinjaku* (Going to look for meat), artist Thomas Stevens, Papunya, 1997.

p7: from *Dukururru-langwa akwa dimamerrbu-langwa alawudawarra* (The story of the Brolga and the Quail), artist David Nangan:golod. Originally written in the Ngalkbun language spoken at Barunga, this Anindilyakwa version from Umbakumba, 1977.

p8: from *Ngirramini Ngini Yamparriparri* (Story of the bad spirit), artist Fiona Kerinauia, Nguiu (Bathurst Island), 1999.

p9: from *Yeye apme kwerlaye-iperre* (The rainbow serpent), artist Jennifer Inkamala, Yipirinya, 1988.

p10: from *Tjukurpa kungkawara* (A story about a young girl), artist Kevin Wirri, Docker River, 1985.

p11: *Nyalindiy bumara yolŋunha mala* (The moon killed people), artist uncredited, Milingibmi, 1975.

p12: from *Ngayulu Tjulpu Kanyini* (What am I holding), artist uncredited, Areyonga, date unknown.

p13: from *Kalinja-kurlu* (The married couple), artist Jeremiah John Japaljarri, Yuendumu, 1993.

p14-15, p31: from *Tjukurpa Utjulanguŋu Ngalya Pitjantja* (A story about a trip from Areyonga to here), artist Kevin Wirri, Kaltukatjara (Docker River), 1984.

p17: from *Kapu.yirlatu kuli*, artist uncredited, Warruwi (Goulburn Island), 1974.

p21: from *Baman* (A long time ago), artist Robert Williams, Maningrida, 1990.

p23: from bark painting of ancestral hero *Ganbulapula*, artist uncredited, Yirrkala, 1985.

p25: from *Arleye uthene angepe uthene* (Crow and emu dreamtime story), artist uncredited, Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa), date unknown.



p26: from *Lagu* (Sugarbag) by Wingathana, originally written and illustrated in the 1970s and reprinted with hand-coloured images and later digitally-coloured images in the 2000s at Numbulwar.

p27: from *Wurrijinguwi ngini Manunguli* (The flowers of blood), artist Marguerita Kerinaiaua, Nguiu (Bathurst Island), 1990.

p28: from *Kunajarrayi-kirli yawulyu* (Designs from Kunaja), artist Jeannie Herbert Nungarrayi and Elizabeth Ross Nungarrayi, Lajamanu, 1999.

p30: *Yingarna yagina*, artist uncredited, Angurugu, date unknown.

p32: from *Pintaherraherre* (Emu), artist uncredited, Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa), date unknown.

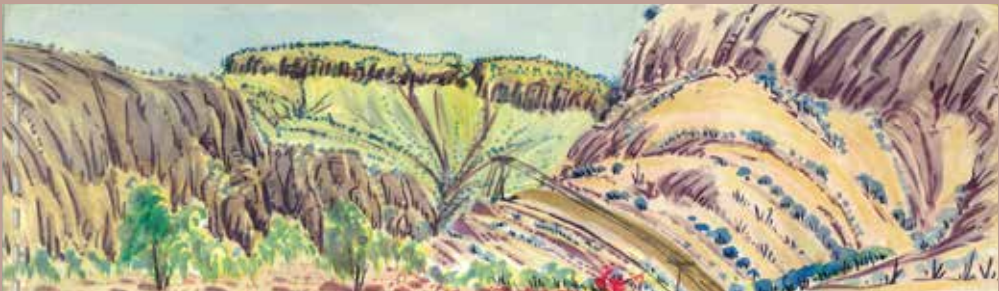
Back: from *Ku Kananganthan I Ku Kumpit* (The emu and the kangaroo), artist uncredited, Wadeye, 1983.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Living Archive of Aboriginal Languages project team would like to thank the following people (among many others) for their assistance and support.

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[www.cdu.edu.au/laal](http://www.cdu.edu.au/laal)



A digital archive of endangered literature in Australian Indigenous languages from bilingual schools in the Northern Territory



Australian  
National  
University