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Historical perspectives

Murrinh ku thepini pumpanpunmat (Netmarluk)

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Historical perspectives: Murrinh ku thepini pumpanpunmat (Netmarluk)

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Let no one say the past is dead. The past is all about us and within. (Noonuccal, 1992)

Abstract

The History Wars in Australia started in the 1990's with political recognition and discussion of the *unresolved cultural struggle over the nature of the Indigenous dispossession and the place it should assume in Australian self-understanding* (Manne, 2009, p.1). The Prime Minister of Australia of the time, Paul Keating, spoke openly about the crimes committed against Indigenous people throughout Australia's history but with government change some of the subsequent leaders, particularly John Howard, challenged this black-armed view of history (Manne, 2009). The History Wars provided the stage against which the Australian Curriculum: History (ACARA, 2014) was written, and tensions remain about what should be taught and in what context, particularly considering the cross-curricular priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures (ACARA, 2014).

This is the context within which the following essay is written, it was 2016 when a student in Wadeye enrolled in a unit ECU102: History for Schools and a lecturer from Charles Darwin University visited to facilitate learning. In discussion, the student later revealed that she had been apprehensive about the unit, worried that it would take a colonial slant and focus on the landing of the first fleet and early settlement of southern Australia. Instead the lecturer introduced a unit that asked students to critique versions of historical events and consider interpretations from different socio-cultural perspectives.

The second assignment for the unit required students to read and review Australian historical fiction and comment on how it developed their historical understanding while stimulating some notion of ethics or morality in response to the recorded event or social history (Charles Darwin University, 2016). The following essay is in response to this assignment and based on the book *Murrinhku Thepini pumpanpunmat* produced by the local Literacy Production Centre which was illustrated and written in Murrinhpatha. Importantly the book was reviewed and critique considering other text-based resources but also local oral histories so that different versions of events emerged.

Murrinh ku thepini pumpanpunmat (Nemarluk)

The main characters in the story are Nemarluk, the Japanese and the people from Port Keats region. According to the Northern Territory Police website (2016), Port Keats was named after Vice Admiral, Sir Richard G Keats, who commanded many British battleships in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Captain Phillip Parker Kin on the Ship called the Mermaid gave it this name in 1819. Murrinhpatha people of Werntek Nganaiyi (first mission) were the people Father Docherty first found at Port Keats.

Nemarluk was a great leader of the Murrinhpatha people of Werntek Nganaiyi. He was always protecting his people and his land from other clans attacking. He was also a great hunter who fed his people all year round when the wet season was difficult for others. The people of Murrinhpatha always fought for their land. There were about 6 or 7 Murrinhpatha clans that were always protected by Nemarluk and his group. His group was selected fighters from the Murrinhpatha clans.

The book is aimed for grade 4s right up to grade 10, 11 & 12.

The books are all written in Murrinhpatha. The local language of Wadeye is not spoken anywhere other than within the community of Wadeye. Until the 1970's Murrinhpatha was only an oral language. In the early 1970's Chester Street and other people started to make an alphabet and to put Murrinhpatha into writing. The students learn to read Murrinhpatha so they can read the story themselves.

Murrinh ku Thepini pumpunpunmat tells the traditional story of Nemarluk and his men and how they murdered the Captain of the Japanese boat that was near the Ngarntimeli beach in 1931 (NT News, 2006a). They killed the captain in the bush and hid him in the jungle. Once they killed the captain they went off on their canoes to the big boat and killed the other Japanese that were on the boat and chased after the Tiwi men. Somehow the Tiwi men escaped from them. This is the story of Nemarluk after this event.

In the Murrinh patha version of the story about Nemarluk, called Murrinh ku Thepini pumpunpunmat, Nemarluk attacked the Japanese sailors because the Japanese sailors lied about having no tobacco. According to the Our History article 'Bloody trail of murder in Top End' from the NT NEWS, 2006a, the Japanese were looking for water, fire, wood and women. They were given wood and water and later on, five aboriginal women were taken to the boat. The Japanese gave Nemarluk and his men tobacco in exchange.

There are several other things that are different between the story book and the history articles. In the newspaper article, the Tiwi men warned the Japanese that Nemarluk and his men were 'cheeky' and they noticed that they came on board with axes. This isn't mentioned in the story book. Both the story book and the articles tell how the Tiwi men lied and said that the boat sank, and the Japanese drowned. Then they told the priest that the Japanese were killed by Nimarluk and his men. The Tiwi men and the priest then told the police what Nemarluk has done to the Japanese sailors. The police took the Tiwi mob back to the place where it had happened and then the police tracked them down looking for the killers. Also, it was because the help of local people in the area the authorities were able to find the boat and the bones of the Japanese. Nym Bunduck (Parntak) the newspaper article and the book both mention chains being put around the necks of the men when they were captured. The picture on the cover of the book is of men with chains around their necks. The photo in the article shows that the men are also chained up around their necks. The photo in the articles shows this also. In the story book and articles Nemarluk was captured but escaped from Fannie Bay jail. In the book and our traditional story, it says he jumped over high fence and swam across the harbour to escape. In the newspaper articles, it says he walked out with the workers and escaped and probably walked out around the harbour to find his way home. Another difference is that the story book ends after talking about him escaping again. In the newspaper article shows great details about what happened after his great escape, who chased him and how he was bought back to Katherine. Birt a policeman said, "I drooped in the saddle, Fitzer likewise, Nemarluk, on the contrary, showed no signs of fatigue who marched for miles through heat, bog and flooded rivers without complaint".

The story is important because it's part of the history of Port Keats (Wadeye) for the history to be passed on to the future like we are studying by looking at the book, news articles and asking elders. The elders know the story to tell but the book and article gives us more details of what Nemarluk was like according to non-indigenous people that probably have never lived in the area.

Eventually Nimarluk was captured at Yempunhi but escaped after six months of tracking by Bul bul and other police trackers he was captured at Legena

Another version of the story told by Mary Naye, my great grandma, and Gypsy Jinjair who was Nym Bunduck's sister and my great aunt, was recorded by Mark Crocombe in 1993. This was translated to

Mark by Cletus Dumoo. These two ladies were alive when this thing happened. The story is nearly the same as the other about the murder of the Japanese, but the ladies have used different names. Mary Naye and Gypsy Jinjair say in their story that Nemarluk was in the group but he wasn't the one who killed the Japanese. They say it was Cumaiyi and Perdjert who murdered the Japanese. Mary Naye and Gypsy Jinjair didn't want to talk more about Nemarluk. They respected him because he was the leader of the Murrinhpatha people and the protector who always protected his people. Nemarluk was also a teacher that taught young boys to hunt all year around in the right seasons. The story is of interest because it was the first killing of Japanese men by the aboriginal people of Port Keats (Wadeye). Yet according to the old stories Nemarluk often raided other aboriginal communities killing people and stealing women.

The story relates to the community because Nemarluk was important to the Murrinhpatha (murrinhpatha) people from Werntek Nganaiyi (Old Mission). This was before the news of Father Richard Docherty spread across the lands some people (tribes) walked from their homelands (country) to Wadeye to see Father Richard Docherty, this was in 1935.

Children would find it interesting to know the history of Nemarluk and aboriginal warriors and the book has a lot of pictures and not a lot of writing. The children would be excited to hear more about the story.

Other warriors includes The Kimberley Warrior, his name was Jandamarra, is a similar story to Nemarluk's. He attacked five white men who were setting up cattle station in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia, with some of his men. Jandamarra was protecting his country and he was trying to stop people from coming to his country. He died in 1897 thirty four years before Nemarluk story.

Another person is Pemulwuy from Parramatta, Botany Bay, Sydney. He was an Aboriginal Warrior and a muscular person who fought for his land and his people.

His people were being killed so he tried to protect them. He was injured for two years when the Convicts from England shot him after twelve years. They cut off his head and sent it to Sir Joseph Banks for his collection. This was in 1802 a long time before Nemarluk's story.

As mentioned before there have been several versions of the story. The newspaper articles are Secondary sources. So are the internet versions. Nganpe's version is a Primary source because he wrote the story and he was there when it had happened. My grandfather, Stephen Bundock who is the son of Nym Bundock (Parntak) told me his version of the story he. He was a boy when these things happened.

The students can find the secondary information about Nemarluk on Wikipedia or Newspapers. For the other two Jandamarra and Pemulwuy can be on the internet sites and YouTube. The story book Murrinh ku Thepini Pumpanpunmat about Nemarluk is a primary source because it is was told by a local elder. I heard stories about him by my grandfather, other elder people from Wadeye and the journalist who wrote on newspapers.

This story could be used in the classroom for students in Years 4 upwards. I would engage students by creating visual images of the story through Power Point presentation, with pictures to talk about, show them a video on you tube and read them the book and news articles. I would also arrange an excursion to show the students where it happened.

The students in their class could act out the story. A teacher would read the story and the kids could do a little play or they could just do a role play without reading it to them.

This story could be used to meet History and Geography outcomes in the Australian Curriculum. For example, in Year 4 **how people, places and environments interact, past and present.**

Some other outcomes in Australia Curriculum (2016) that this story could be used for include; Pose questions to investigate people, events, places and issues (ACHASSI073), Locate and collect information and data from different sources, including observations (ACHASSI074), Sequence information about people's lives and events (ACHASSI076). This last one could be a lesson making a timeline of Nemarluk's life. One of the concepts for developing understanding of history that comes from the Curriculum documents could be the nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for

example, people and environments (ACHASSK086)

There are other moral and ethical issues about Namarluk as it shows in the articles, 'Fierce guerrilla resistance warriors'....Or 'Barbarous killer' NT News (2006b, p. 20). No, he wasn't a hero but he was a good hunter and always looked out for other tribes entering his land. He was a protector of the land by chasing them away with spears. I don't think he was a hero because he was trading women to get tobaccos from other clans. He murdered the Japanese when they weren't attacking him.

For some people, Namarluk was a Hero that protected his land and his people, but for others they say that Namarluk was a murderer. Some people believe that he was a great hunter and was always feeding his people when they had difficult times like in the wet seasons. For other people they believe that he was a strong man who walked back from Darwin and came all the way back to his country. These different opinions make some moral and ethical issues that could be discussed with the children. Some of the questions the students could be asked are "Was Namarluk a good person?", "Was he a hero?", "Would you be in his band of Warriors?" It is important that the children make their own decision about whether Namarluk was a hero or not.

In conclusion, because there are so many versions, both traditional oral and printed it is very difficult to say exactly which version is true. In my personal opinion, Nganbe's book is the one that I was always believed because it's the same story that my grandfather had told me.

Conclusion

This essay of Namarluk opened new and contrasting versions of the story, introduced issues of bias, silences and interpretation in the portrayal of historic events. Writing the essay also produced a wonderful opportunity for this detailed and textually dense Murrinhpatha book to demonstrate that two-way bilingual learning is compatible with the Australian Curriculum: History. The essay and book became resources for the development of several history lessons in a Year 5 class, including guest presentations from local Elders. This experience provides a success story of integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures into history curriculum despite the history wars as it ensures that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students see their cultural identity and knowledge reflected in their school experiences* (ACARA, 2014).

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