

KIMBERLEY STORIES

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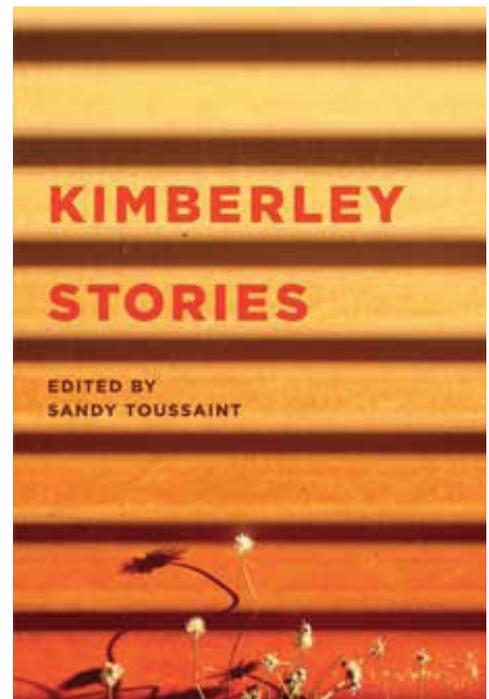
ABOUT THE BOOK

Kimberley Stories is rich with stories about the north-western landscape and the people who live or visit there. Twenty-six Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers use a range of narrative styles to share their experience of Kimberley life: some use poetry, others a short story or a work of creative non-fiction. One person, Peter Bibby, uses a short play about a fictive place he calls Oombulu. Each writer tells a story from their own perspective and this can reveal a different way of learning or thinking about the Kimberley. Jimmy Chi, well-known author of the play and film script *Bran Nue Dae*, has written a poignant poem about the harshness of life in a northern town; thirteen-year-old Luisa Mitchell's story is a light, lyrical piece about being a teenager in Broome, and Stephen Scourfield uses notions and representations of colour to distil his thoughts about past and present Kimberley life. Jacqueline Wright uses delicate prose to explore the qualities and questions that emerge through the fluctuations of seasonal change, and Marminjiya Nuggett's delightful 'good luck' story focuses on a family fishing day on the Kimberley's mighty Fitzroy River. Other stories, such as Pat Lowe's 'Seagull', relay both the resilience and the fragility of wildlife, and Robyn Wells and Bonita Mason each evoke some of the shadows and complexities that underpin everyday social life in Kimberley towns. Elsewhere Pat Mamanyjun Torres describes generations of Indigenous heritage and relationships to family and country over time, and Lesley Corbett's melodic piece shows the intertwining of loved persons with the Kimberley landscape. These twenty-six pieces reveal the Kimberley as an extraordinary place in which to have been born or raised, but also one that invites the reader to visit. Once known, never forgotten: the Kimberley gets under your skin.

FROM THE BOOK'S EDITOR

I am an anthropologist who has worked in the Kimberley since 1981. I've published lots of academic writing, but also some creative non-fiction, a children's story, and poetry that's been published under a pseudonym. Before studying anthropology many years ago, I wanted to become a full-time writer so I worked backstage for theatre in Melbourne and London as a way to refine my writing skills and learn about stage production. I also travelled a lot and became increasingly interested in different cultural ways of living, something that built on my experiences growing up in Melbourne.

An interest in cultural life is one of the things that drew me to anthropology but especially to the Kimberley: in so many ways I have valued the involvement I have with Aboriginal families in Fitzroy Valley communities, an area around 400 kilometres east of the coastal town of Broome. I have learnt so much about a culture different from my own, as well as about a shared humanity: the joys, sorrows and complex ups and downs of life that are common to us all.



The idea for compiling and editing a book called *Kimberley Stories* began a few years ago during one of the occasions I was working in the Kimberley. On the four and a half hour drive from Fitzroy Crossing to Broome, I started thinking about how there were many different stories to tell about the Kimberley, stories by Aboriginal and kartiya (non-Aboriginal) people, and that these could be told in a variety of styles from different vantage points. With the Kimberley as the unifying theme, I also wanted to introduce some new writers, as well as feature more established writers, as an inclusive way of creative storytelling. I thought that the book could show that each way of storytelling can be equally meaningful regardless of topic, emphasis or style, or the age and experience of each author, poet or artist.

Kimberley Stories is not my first book; it is my sixth. The very first one was titled *Willy and Mr Taggle*. The story was written mostly for my then very young daughter, Bree. She used to ask for the same story each night before going to bed so I eventually put it down on paper. An artist friend, Jas Cartwright, created some truly wonderful drawings, and we sent a manuscript away for publication. It was published in 1977 and became a feature of that year's WA Children's Book Week in Perth.

There have been other books since then and they focus mostly on anthropological topics such as native title, the cultural politics of juries, past and present Kimberley Aboriginal life, and social and environmental issues. In some ways, *Kimberley Stories* brings many aspects of my own life together, weaving, as it does, a rich spectrum of stories about a place I cherish, as do the many contributing authors whose superb writing gives the book life.

I am an Adjunct Professor in Social and Environmental Inquiry at The University of Western Australia where I am regularly involved in writing and research projects, and a variety of related activities. Writing, reading, and thinking are always there in some form, both at the university and most other places as well.

STUDY NOTES

1. Before you read *Kimberley Stories*, write at least three paragraphs about what you know or have learnt about the Kimberley.

For example, were you born, or have you lived in or visited there? Or have you read/heard about the Kimberley via the media or visitors to the region? Have you stayed in the resort town of Broome, or travelled inland to places such as Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek, or further east to Kununurra? Describe your impressions of the Kimberley and why you would, or would not, like to return/visit there.

2. Drawing on your response to Question 1, select three chapters from the book at random and read them (your choice can include a short story, the play extract and a poem, or three short stories, or three poems, etc) to explore the following questions:

- How closely aligned were your earlier impressions of the Kimberley with the insights gained after reading three chapters from *Kimberley Stories*?
- What were key points raised that you had – or had not – considered before?
- Did the author's style persuade you to think differently about the Kimberley, or was it the topic in the piece that interested you more? Was it both things? How were these merged?
- Of the three selected chapters, was one more convincing in style and emphasis than the others? Why?

3. *Kimberley Stories* includes work by new and established authors. Write a short essay to explain the strengths and the weaknesses of writers with publishing experience compared with those who do not have such experience. (You might need to check Contributor Information at pages 199–210 before starting this exercise.) In your essay you might like to write about qualities such as passion for the topic, narrative devices, and what and how you learnt about Kimberley life in each piece.

4. Compare and contrast the chapters by Pat Mamanyjun Torres (pages 74–86) and historian Cathie Clement (pages 129–141). What aspects of history do you learn most about from each author? In what way are these complementary, reconcilable or distinctive?

5. The poem by Robyn Wells, 'butcherman' (pages 166–168), is embedded with gritty symbolism and metaphor. What is the poem's key emphasis for you? Why? Is it a poem that resonates with the Kimberley only?

6. Read Luisa Mitchell's 'A pair of feet' (pages 154–159) and then imagine yourself as a thirteen-year-old living and going to school in Broome or another Kimberley location. Is it possible to imagine the experience without having actually known it? How and to what extent does Luisa's story compare with your own life? Why might the two differ? What might be shared?

7. Kate Auty's opening chapter is titled 'Arriving, departing and never quite leaving' (pages 18–26). Read this chapter and discuss the choice of title in relation to the following questions:

- What is '303'? How and why is it a motif for Auty's chapter?
- What is Auty's overriding message about life as a child in the Kimberley compared to her more recent experience as an adult?
- How would you describe Auty's narrative style? What are some examples from her text?
- Does Auty still live in the Kimberley? What is the role of memory in our relationships with a place?

8. Donna Bing-Ying Mak (pages 108–118) writes about a number of connections that can be made between life in her family homelands of China and Hong Kong, and life and work with Aboriginal people as a medical doctor in the Kimberley. After reading Mak's chapter, turn to Kelvin Garlett's (pages 169–171) and explore his connections as a Noongar man to cherished Kimberley mates. What, if any, are the threads that weave through both chapters? How important are notions of identity and family in these? Draw on the text in both chapters to support your argument.

9. Imagine you are a theatre critic watching a rehearsal or preview of Peter Bibby's 'From Escapadia' (pages 173–196). Your role is to review the work, especially the dialogue, stage direction and actor roles to assess viability for a major production to open in Sydney and then tour Australia. Your review should take into account play content, emphasis, and possible performance venues, as well as suggestions for who should play certain roles. Finally, based on this assessment, make a strong case for or against the opening of the play and its touring to remote, regional and urban settings.

10. Kim Mahood's piece (pages 41–43) visually combines text and artwork. She uses limited space to convey a huge message. In this context, what is Mahood's work mostly about? What does it say to you? How might her work be interpreted when considered visually and textually?

11. Read *Kimberley Stories* from cover to cover and then write a major review for the *Australian* newspaper's review liftout. Keep in mind the need to discuss the work's strengths, weaknesses and aspirations, literary devices and emphases, interest in exploring the Kimberley from divergent perspectives, and inclusion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, both established and new. You need also to keep in mind that newspapers generally want the style to be accessible for a range of readers so your review should be no more than 800 words, and employing an economic mode of writing.

12. Steve Hawke's story about writing the play *Jandamarra* (pages 121–128) makes several key points about working with Bunuba people when developing the play script. What are these key points? Describe their importance when Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people work together on writing and other projects. What else could be considered in cross-cultural and linguistic textual translation, and the development of a play like *Jandamarra*?

13. What does Andrew Burke (pages 142–148) learn from his students? Why is the Wanalirri song so central to Burke's story? What are readers likely to learn about teaching in Kimberley community schools, and how might this differ from the experience of teaching and learning in a school located in a less remote place? Do you think making this a mandatory reading in Australian schools would be a good idea or not, and why? What are teachers likely to learn from the students, as well as from Burke?

14. What underlies Murray Jennings' statement, 'A bizarre set-up anywhere else, but in the Kimberley, this was perfectly normal'? (page 102). In your discussion of his chapter (pages 97–107), consider the following sub-questions:

- What is the context in which Jennings is writing? Does this mean that the words he uses help to explain, or confuse, that context?
- Does Jennings' use of humour and pathos work in his discussion of 'Sandy's Send-off'?

c. How would you describe the language Jennings uses to give readers an impression of life in Halls Creek?
d. What emotional sense could readers be left with after reading Jennings' account? What emotions did it arouse in you?

15. In essay form, respond to the following: With reference to a selection of works from *Kimberley Stories*, consider how and why physical, cultural or emotional connections to a place remain when the people who write about it are absent from that place. Do people need to be 'in place' to write about it?

16. In creative non-fiction or poetry or play form, write about a place that has got under your skin.