

SEEING SALTWATER COUNTRY

SALLY MAYMAN AND DALE KENTWELL

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YEAR LEVEL: Y7–12

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITIES: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Sustainability

ABOUT THE BOOK

The Dampier Peninsula in Australia's north-west is home to many remote Aboriginal communities. Painter Dale Kentwell and photographer Sally Mayman have collaborated with the people of the region in a series of portraits that depicts remote community life and celebrates the beauty of a place unlike any other. At the heart of these portraits is a strong and enduring connection to country.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sally Mayman has been a photographer since the 1980s, working as a commercial photographer and an artist. She has specialised in photographing people and landscapes, with many clients from corporate, editorial, not-for-profit and government organisations. Sally's personal work explores the importance of people's connection to their environment and sense of place. She has had several solo exhibitions as well as over 30 group shows. With a background in fine art darkroom printing, Sally explores early printing processes, runs photography programs in primary and high schools and is currently completing a Master of Art at UNSW Art and Design.

Dale Kentwell has been a practising artist since the 1980s and works across different media. She completed an art certificate at TAFE NSW and a BA and MA in visual arts at UNSW Art and Design. She has studied bush regeneration and bush land management and continues to work in this field. Dale has had 10 solo shows and has been involved in numerous group shows. Her practice is informed by environmental ideas and conservation. She believes artists have a responsibility and a perfect platform to conduct meaningful dialogue with a larger audience.

THEMES

- Indigenous histories and cultures
- Bardi language
- Remote community life
- Family and cultural identity
- Environmental protection and sustainability in the Dampier Peninsula
- Visual art
- Photography
- Art as a platform for social change

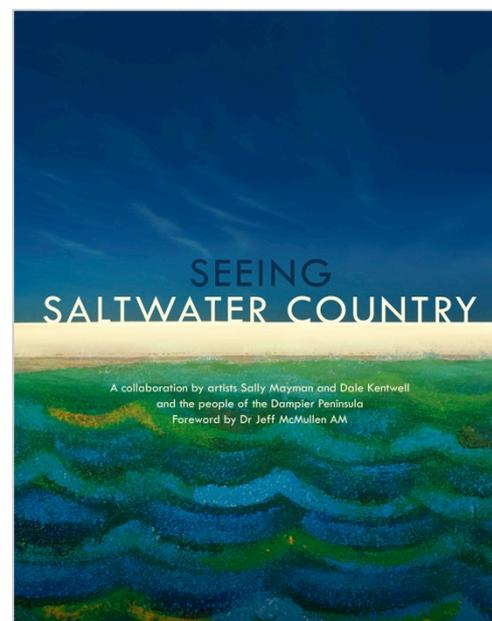
AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y7–12 English

Y7–12 Visual art

Y7–12 Biology

Y11–12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies



USEFUL WEBSITES

- *Saltwater Country* exhibition: www.saltwatercountry.net.au
- Save The Kimberley: www.savethekimberley.com
- ABC Splash – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures: splash.abc.net.au/home#!/topic/494038/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures
- Department of Education WA Aboriginal Education Portal – Kimberley Region: www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/apac/detcms/aboriginal-education/apac/lesson-plans/kimberley-education-region.en?cat-id=9193382

CLASSROOM IDEAS

Discussion questions

1. What does the phrase ‘saltwater country’ mean?
2. Where is Bardi country? Shade this region on a map of Western Australia. Have you ever visited? What did you enjoy most about your trip?
3. Who are the Traditional Owners of the area your school is located in?
4. As you view the photographs and paintings throughout the book, create a list of unique features of the Dampier Peninsula landscape. How is the natural environment different to your home?
5. How is day-to-day remote community life depicted? In what ways is it similar/different to city life? In what ways is it similar/different to rural life?
6. Describe the relationship between the photographs, paintings and anecdotes throughout the book. Compare and contrast these mediums. How do they complement and extend one another?
7. What are the issues raised by each of the people participating in the project? Are there any common themes?
8. How are the following issues explored in the book? Provide examples.
 - a. Connection to country
 - b. Fear about forced removal from land in the future
 - c. Fear about environmental destruction
 - d. Distrust of the government due to past/present policies
 - e. Experiences of racism
9. Mayman states she believes *artists have an important role in encouraging people to connect with what they feel, even if this is confronting.* (p. 11) How do some of these stories and images make you feel?
10. The importance of sharing stories is emphasised throughout the book. Do you feel it is important to hear these stories? Why?

Biological sciences and sustainability

1. The Dampier Peninsula is home to a range of habitats, including *woodlands (pindan), savannah landscapes, paperbark forests, grasslands, sand dunes and mangrove swamps.* (p. 94) Select one habitat and describe the natural features, flora, fauna and environmental threats faced.
2. Select an endangered plant or animal species from the Dampier Peninsula. Create a poster or pamphlet detailing the following: habitat, diet, physical characteristics, labelled diagram, life cycle, reasons for endangered status.
3. Why are many members of the communities in *Seeing Saltwater Country* opposed to the Western Australian government’s plan to build a giant gas hub at James Price Point?
4. The book’s foreword provides some alarming statistics about soon to be extinct bird and plant species (p. 9). What do the terms ‘conservation’ and ‘sustainability’ mean? What are some sustainable alternatives to gas energy? Compare the advantages and disadvantages of a range of energy sources.
5. What is an oil spill? How do oil spills impact ocean and land environments?
6. What is the Save The Kimberley campaign? What role has *Seeing Saltwater Country* played in contributing to it? (Useful websites: www.savethekimberley.com/whats-at-stake/country-culture; www.savethekimberley.com/whats-at-stake/kimberley-environment)

Photography

1. Select your favourite photograph by Sally Mayman in the book, then answer the following:
 - a. Describe the composition (arrangement of objects in the photograph). Do pattern, symmetry or texture play a role in the image?
 - b. Describe the vantage point (angle from which the photo was taken) and the depth of field (what part of the image is in sharp focus and what part is blurred).
 - c. Describe the effect of lighting and contrast (difference between shadow and highlights).
 - d. Describe the colour palette – is it bright or dull? Has a filter been applied?
 - e. What concept or idea do you think the photographer is trying to convey through the above artistic decisions? Do you think the photo is successful? What emotions did this photograph trigger in you? What would you do differently if you were the photographer?
2. Using your knowledge of the above conventions, photograph a place that is special to you. Select, edit and present a single image to your class that you feel best captures a sense of this place. Explain your artistic choices to the class.
3. Mayman writes, *I often used a Holga camera, which has a simple plastic lens. It brings many of its own wonderful (though sometimes frustrating) subtle qualities to the images, such as blurred edges and dropped focus, which suited the work.* (p. 14) What are the rewards and challenges of working with a film camera – especially compared to a digital camera that allows you to view the images you shot? Why does the Holga suit Mayman's work here?
4. Use a film camera (a Holga if the class has access to it) to create an evocative photographic portrait.

Visual art

1. Artist Dale Kentwell describes her work as having a *naïve, colourist style*. (p. 16) How would you describe her 'portraits in landscape' in *Seeing Saltwater Country*? What objects are found in the landscapes? How does the artist use textile patterns, tiling and repetition of colour sequences? What do you like about her style? What would you do differently if you were the artist?
2. Which painting in *Seeing Saltwater Country* is your favourite and why?
3. Kentwell states that she believes visual art is *a perfect platform to talk about issues that affect the physical and spiritual lives of humanity*. (p. 15) What makes this medium effective in stimulating discussion? She identifies as an *environmental artist* – what does this mean?
4. Kentwell suggests that creativity can be used as a form of *peaceful resistance to destructive political ideology*. (p. 15) How is *Seeing Saltwater Country* an example of this?
5. Are there any issues that you feel strongly about? Why are they important to you? How might you use creative arts to raise awareness about one of these topics? Using a creative medium of your choice (e.g. watercolour, acrylic, oil pastels, sculpture, mixed media, installation, photography, video, music, dance), work either individually or with a classmate to create an artwork with a message.
6. Using watercolours, acrylic or oil pastels, create a large landscape artwork of your favourite place in nature.

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