

## SISTER HEART

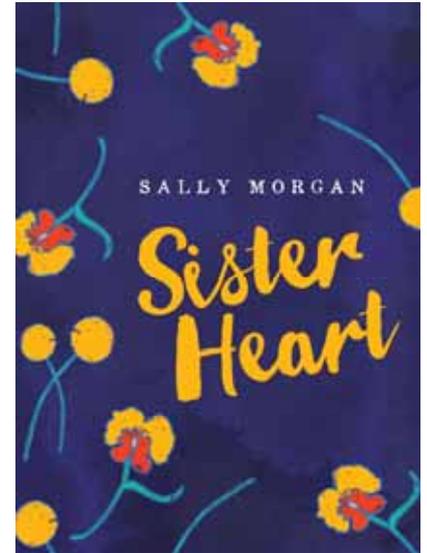
Sally Morgan

ISBN (HB): 9781925163131

Themes: Friendship, Family, The Stolen Generations, Australian history, Grief and loss

Year level: Y4–9

Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures



### ABOUT THE BOOK

A young Aboriginal girl is taken from the north of Australia and sent to an institution in the distant south. There, she slowly makes a new life for herself and, in the face of tragedy, finds strength in new friendships.

Poignantly told from the child's perspective, *Sister Heart* affirms the power of family and kinship.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Morgan is an award-winning Aboriginal writer and artist who comes from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She has written for both children and adults, including the acclaimed autobiography *My Place*. Her art is held in a number of national and international collections.



### CLASSROOM IDEAS

#### For younger and older readers

##### *Aboriginal people and cultures*

1. Annie is taken from the north-west of Western Australia to the south. Answer the following questions, using the map of Aboriginal Australia to help: <http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aboriginal-australia-map>
  - a. What are the names of some of the Aboriginal nations in the north-west of Western Australia?
  - b. The author, Sally Morgan, comes from the Palyku people. Can you find the Palyku people on the map? (Hint: look next to the red line that divides the 'northwest' from the 'desert' region.)
2. The south-west, where Annie is taken to, are the lands of the Noongar people. Visit <http://www.noongarculture.org.au> and navigate to the map to answer the following:
  - a. Noongar country is divided into different regions. How many are there? (Six: Ballardong, Gnaala Karla Booja, South West Boojarah, Wagly Kaip, Whadjuk, Yued)
3. Aboriginal people sometimes perform a Welcome to Country ceremony, and non-Aboriginal people acknowledge the Traditional Owners of an area.
  - a. Can you find out who the Traditional Owners of the area where your school is located are?
  - b. What is a Welcome to Country ceremony and why is it important?
  - c. For information on Welcome to Country ceremonies, refer to the Reconciliation Australia factsheet *Welcome to Country & Acknowledgement of Country*, downloadable at: <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/resources>
4. Before Annie was taken away by the government she often looked for bush food with her family. Later, the environment around the institution she is taken to is important to her and to Janey and Tim. How do the following help Annie, Janey and Tim to survive and be strong?
  - The bush food (pp. 62, 153, 186, 204)
  - The laughing stone (pp. 105–106, 123, 214)
  - The billy buttons (pp. 184, 245–246)
  - The crying tree (pp. 106, 113–114, 149, 229–231, 245)
  - The stick doll (pp. 110–112, 238)
  - The kookaburra (pp. 107, 249–251)

5. Aboriginal kinship structures link extended Aboriginal families together in a network of relationships and responsibilities. When *Sister Heart* begins Annie has already been taken away from her family but she thinks about them throughout the book.
  - a. Who is in Annie's family? (The following family members are mentioned in *Sister Heart* – page references are to the first mention: Mum p. 12, Grandpa Mick p. 12, Granny Rosy p. 12, Aunty Adie p. 18, her little sister p. 28, grannies p. 36, cousins p. 40, aunts p. 77) Who has Annie added to her family by the end of the book (pp. 240–241)?
  - b. On p. 99, Janey says to Annie: *You cryin' for your mummy and daddy? / Your brothers and sisters? / Your aunts and uncles? / Your cousins? / Your grannies?* On p. 113, Annie thinks: *At home I share / with my cousin brothers / and cousin sisters / and they share with me.* What does this tell us about Aboriginal families? How is this like your own family? How is it different?
  - c. For a short video which gives a basic explanation of Aboriginal kinship structures, refer to the one produced by Reconciliation Australia: <http://shareourpride.org.au/sections/our-culture>. Teachers using the book for older readers may wish to refer to the University of Sydney Kinship Learning Module: <http://sydney.edu.au/kinship-module>.
6. *Sister Heart* is about a period in Australian history when Aboriginal people were discriminated against. Now Australia has weeks in the year when we celebrate Aboriginal cultures and histories. As a class, plan something your school could do for National Reconciliation Week or NAIDOC week. (Teachers with older students may wish to have them develop a Reconciliation Action Plan for the school, or examine the ways in which an existing Reconciliation Action Plan has changed the school.) For further information about National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC week, and Reconciliation Action Plans see:
  - <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/nrw>
  - <http://www.naidoc.org.au>
  - <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/schools/raps>

## For younger readers

### Stolen Generations

For information/guides concerning the Stolen Generations to assist in the teaching of this section, refer to:

- The Australian Human Rights Commission's *Bringing Them Home* Education Module: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/education/bringing\\_them\\_home/rightsED\\_Bringing\\_them\\_home.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/education/bringing_them_home/rightsED_Bringing_them_home.pdf)
- The Australian Human Rights Commission *Bringing Them Home* Community Guide: [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bth\\_Community%20guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bth_Community%20guide_final.pdf)
- The website of the National Sorry Day Committee, which contains a summary of the Stolen Generations history and the meaning of the term: <http://www.nscd.org.au/stolen-generations-history>

### Discussion questions

1. Annie is part of the 'Stolen Generations'. Who are the Stolen Generations?
2. During the Stolen Generations era the names of many children were changed. What effect did this have on Annie and Janey (e.g. pp. 119–121)?
3. In 2008 Prime Minister Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generations. (The text of the Apology: <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>)
  - a. Why does it matter to say sorry?
  - b. How do you think Annie would have reacted if she had heard the Apology?
  - c. What is National Sorry Day? Refer to: [www.nscd.org.au](http://www.nscd.org.au). As a class, plan something you could do for National Sorry Day.

### Storytelling

4. Annie is very scared when she comes to the institution, but then she meets Janey (pp. 59–60). Write a story about how you first met one of your friends.

5. *Sister Heart* is a verse novel, which is a mix of poetry and prose. Do you think it is easier or harder to write in verse? Write a short story in verse.
6. Make a map of the institution – where is the school? The dormitory? The hospital? The crying tree?
7. Draw a picture of the institution, and discuss as a class the different ways students have depicted the institution and why they imagined it in that way.
8. *Sister Heart* never tells you how old Annie is, or how old any of her friends are. How old do you think Annie, Janey and Tim are? What is it about the book that makes you think that's their age? Why do you think the author didn't put their ages in the book?
9. Tim gives Annie the laughing stone to cheer her up when she is sad (pp. 105–106). Why does it matter to have something to cheer you up? Write a story or draw a picture of something that makes you feel better when you are sad.

## For older readers

### Stolen Generations

For information/guides concerning the Stolen Generations to assist in the teaching of this section, refer to:

- The Australian Human Rights Commission's Stolen Generations Education Module:  
[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/education/bringing\\_them\\_home/rightsED\\_Bringing\\_them\\_home.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/education/bringing_them_home/rightsED_Bringing_them_home.pdf)
- A brief summary of the Stolen Generations history and the meaning of the term:  
<http://www.nsdcc.org.au/stolen-generations-history>

### Discussion questions

1. Annie is part of the 'Stolen Generations'. Answer the following questions, referring to the Australian Human Rights Commission *Bringing Them Home* Community Guide:  
[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bth\\_Community%20guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bth_Community%20guide_final.pdf)
  - a. Who are the Stolen Generations?
  - b. When did the period of the Stolen Generations begin and when did it end?
  - c. How many children were taken?
  - d. What effects did the removals have on the children?
2. When do you think *Sister Heart* is set, and why do you think it is set in that time? Would the Stolen Generations laws and policies have ended in Annie's lifetime?
3. Identify the ways being taken away has affected Annie, referring to specific examples from *Sister Heart*. (For example, p. 154: *Sometimes / I feel my voice / rattling inside me / like a trapped thing / trying to get out / My voice got lost / when bully boots policeman / took me from the station*)
4. On p. 194, Annie thinks: *Inside / we are all secrets / dreaming secret dreams / of another life / My language name / is still hiding / When I go home / and see Mum / it will spring out / like a seed sprouting*. Discuss why it was important for everyone in the institution to hide who they were.
5. In 2008 Prime Minister Rudd apologised to the Stolen Generations. (The text of the Apology:  
<http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples>)
  - a. Refer to the text of the Apology. On whose behalf is the Prime Minister apologising? Why is he apologising?
  - b. Watch the video 'The Apology' on Reconciliation Australia's website:  
<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/resources/#apology-video>. Discuss the reactions to the Apology in the video. What impact do you think the Apology had? How do you think Annie would have reacted if she had heard the Apology?

### Storytelling

6. Write the scene when Annie first meets Janey (pp. 59–60) from Janey's perspective instead of Annie's.
7. *Sister Heart* is a verse novel, which is a mix of poetry and prose. Choose a scene from the novel and write it in prose instead of verse.
8. The author sometimes uses references to the environment to describe Annie's experience, e.g. *My heart is leaping / like a panicked bird* (p. 51), *Outside / kids rush me / like a noisy flock of galahs* (p. 59). Why do you think the author does this? What does it tell you about how Annie sees the world?

9. What are some of the ways in which Annie and Janey cope with being in the institution? Refer to specific examples. (For example, p. 105: *Janey grabs my arm / Listen, Annie / Tim and me have a trick / Sometimes we laugh / when we're sad*) What are some of the strategies you use to cope when you are worried or stressed?
10. By the end of the book, Janey has had a strong impact on Annie. Identify the ways in which Janey has changed Annie. What influence do you think your friends have on you?
11. The bush surrounding the institution Annie is placed in becomes very important to her. How does place affect you? Are there places that make you feel better or worse, and why?

### Further online resources (in addition to those already listed in these notes)

- For information on Indigenous people, cultures and histories, including online exhibitions: [www.aiatsis.gov.au/explore](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/explore)
- The ABC Splash website, which contains teaching resources on a variety of topics including Indigenous people: <http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/topic/494038/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures>
- Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning, for a range of teaching resources, as well as school-specific instructions on Reconciliation Action Plans: <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/schools>
- The Stolen Generations testimonies website, for video testimonies of Stolen Generations members: <http://www.stolengenerationstestimonies.com>
- The Stolen Generations Healing Foundation: <http://healingfoundation.org.au/stolen-generations>



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