

About this Guide

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This guide is intended as an educational resource for teachers using *The Australian Outback – The History and Mythology of the Land Down-Under*.

The Guide is divided into several sections – a brief description of the book itself, a list of main individuals mentioned in the book, a series of questions for discussion based on the book and finally a series of topics intended to serve as starting points for further research into Australia and Australian history.

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The Australian Outback tells the story of the discovery and exploration of the great southern continent. It is a story that takes the reader on a journey through the history, exploration, culture, traditions and lifestyle of the outback of Australia, from pre-history to tomorrow.

Beginning in the pre-history of the Aboriginal Dreamtime, the book follows the paths of the early sea travelers who charted the coastline of the new land. It documents the hardships faced by the first European settlers and shows how the pressures to find new food and natural resources led to some of the greatest explorations in history. Tragedy and triumph accompanied those early explorers as they faced a landscape that can be so hostile that it has been used by NASA to test spacesuits intended for use on Mars.

The book examines the significant events in the history of the Outback, such as the gold rush, the rise and fall of the bushrangers and the development of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. It continues with a look at the customs, myths, legends and traditions of the Outback – from boiling the billy to Driza-bone clothing – before concluding with a discussion of the potential threats facing the Outback.

Questions for Discussion

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1. What evidence can you find that Australia had been visited by other cultures before the European explorers “discovered” the Great South Land?
2. The Aboriginal culture in Australia is based very much on oral tradition. Can you think of ways in which this culture can be saved for future generations?
3. The main purpose of James Cook’s voyage was to observe the transit of Venus. What does this mean and why was it important for scientists to observe and record this event?
4. The early settlers in Australia had many problems with basic food supplies. What were the main contributing factors to these problems? How could these settlers have acted differently and become more self-sufficient?
5. Bass was convinced that Tasmania was an island not connected to the mainland of Australia. What evidence did he have to convince him of this?
6. The Blue Mountains were a barrier to the settlers to the west of Sydney. Why did the authorities at first want to discourage exploration to the west? Why did they later change their minds and actively encourage explorers such as Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth?