

AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR CONFRONTS AUSTRALIA'S MOST REMARKABLE MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE — IN A NEW CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK.

AZARIA: A TRUE HISTORY by MAREE COOTE

This astonishing new picture book is launched in 40th anniversary year of the story that shocked the world: that of baby Azaria taken by a dingo in the Australian outback in 1980.

Media reports at the time accused baby Azaria's mother— Lindy Chamberlain— of murder. Lindy Chamberlain was sentenced and jailed before eventually being exonerated.

Maree Coote tells the tale with care and empathy for all players, while pulling no punches with the grim subject matter.

INSPIRATION

“From the moment the story of Azaria and Lindy hit the news, I have not been able to forget it. It is an epic tale, filled with enough archetypal characters to rival a Greek tragedy. For an artist, that's pure inspiration.

Then, whilst at the Bologna Ragazzi Fiere, I was exposed to Asian and European children's folktales which so often exhibit a deep connection to history and place-based truths. These longstanding folktales impressed me with their authenticity and cultural self-awareness. They often depict the traps of ignorance or selfishness or prejudice. Many are cautionary tales. The culture is vivid in these books. It lives on, and so does the essential truth in the tale. That's what is so attractive about them - their unique imagery, unique world view, exotic beauty. Highly decorative, but never merely decorative. They demonstrate a depth of cultural self-awareness and a certain maturity.

As a writer of Australian history for adults, I am also interested in history for children. So when the realisation hit me that Azaria's was a truly archetypal fairy tale material, the book idea seemed inevitable. I wanted to explore what happens when the truth gets lost. And as a nation, I believe we still have not truly confronted this tragic event.

PROCESS

After years of extensive reading and research, I met and interviewed Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton, and also members of legal teams and witnesses, other commentators and writers. So much of this time and effort is not evident in the book, but it's essential in telling any story of living protagonists to know the facts inside-out, and to get it right for all concerned.

My illustrations continued to develop during this process. Some





changed greatly, some very little. It was the visual management of such a vast amount of complex information that was the fundamental challenge here. Each illustration works on a few levels to transmit ideas and concepts to the reader that can encourage thoughts and considerations beyond those iterated in the text. I have great faith in the visual literacy and intelligence of children.

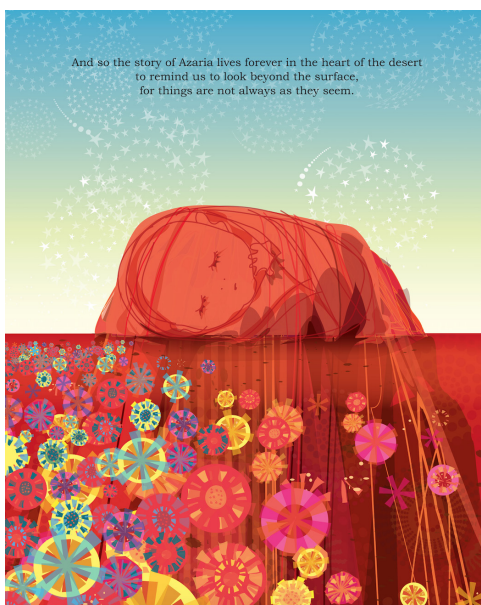
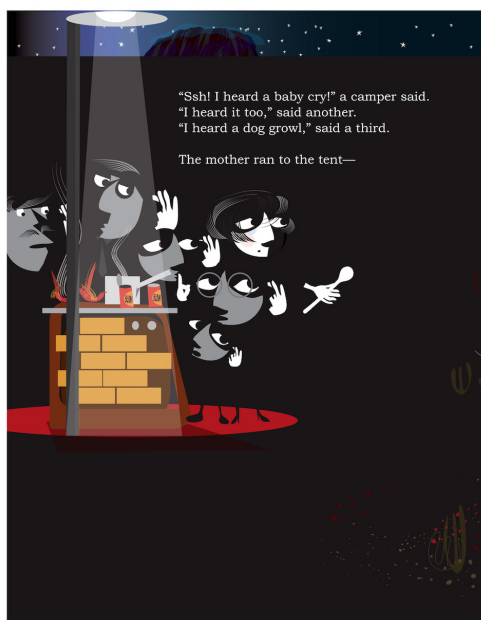
FORMAT

I think the picture book format is a marvellous way to get to the simple truth of a complex story like this. The book is not macabre at all, not judgmental or sensationalist. Ultimately, it's a tale of forgiveness. It is careful, cautionary, and redemptive. In classic folk tales, there is a 'matter-of-fact' style to the telling of a series of events: 'This happened, then that happened, then this happened...'. I believe that young readers can easily follow the sequence of events and notice where things go off the rails, and why.

Kids know when things are not fair, and it resonates deeply with them. It's one of the first protestations we all make as children: "That's not fair!". Truth and fairness are fundamental to humans as social animals. Children are smart, and quick, and know when they are being told the truth - or not - by adults.

I suggest seven or eight years of age and upwards for this one. I worked closely with a child psycho-therapist and with educators during the story development phase. Kids don't recoil so much from the storybook concept of 'threat,' largely because such threat is a remote concept in the bliss of youthful self-obsession. It is we adults who get more fearful as we age, while the young are often blithely unfazed.





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MESSAGE

I wanted to plant the idea that an open mind is an essential accessory in life, that we should think for ourselves and not rush to judgement of others. I wanted to raise the subject of the importance of standing up for yourself as Lindy did, in the face of such an unimaginable attack. And also, the idea of standing up for other people, or at least offering them the benefit of doubt. After all, this could have happened to any one of us. And I wanted to honour the loss of Azaria, by not forgetting.

Finally, of course, I hoped to remind people that this kind of event continues to occur in the wilderness with shocking regularity, even as recently as last year. We simply need to confront this fact, in the interests of a safer, wiser, fairer Australia. — MAREE COOTE.

"I think the book is very accurate yet sensitively done. Not a subject most authors would be brave enough to tackle yet Maree has achieved a brilliant result. Apart from children, the value to teachers is immense with the Notes, and it would make a great coffee table book for adults or overseas friends."

— LINDY CHAMBERLAIN-CREIGHTON.

•The Literature Centre in Western Australia will mount an exhibition of the artworks from June to December 2020.

•The book launch was supported by RMIT University, which has a substantial social justice focus. The book was launched by The Honourable Justice Lex Lasry AM, together with Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton and her husband Rick, and original witnesses and members of the legal teams, all together in the recently restored Capitol Theatre in Melbourne.