

King of the Outback: Teacher notes

Synopsis

King of the Outback tells the true story of Australia's so-called 'Cattle King,' Sir Sidney Kidman.

Sidney Kidman runs away from home at age 13 and travels to the outback on a one-eyed horse. He finds stray cows in the scrub, swims across rivers by hanging on to a bullock's tail and dreams of having the biggest herd of cattle in Australia. Sid builds a cattle empire covering more land than the whole of England. His meat and wool are sold all over the world, and his horses pull trams in Adelaide and carry soldiers in India.

When the workers on Sid's cattle station organise a giant rodeo for Sid's birthday party the cattle from the bush are frightened by the crowds in the city. People panic and horses bolt. But the Kidman stockmen save the day. Sidney's riders are the best in the land.

King of the Outback tells the rags to riches story of one of Australia's greatest pastoral pioneers.

Further Information

Facts & Figures at the back of the book provide additional information about the life of Sir Sidney Kidman.

This material touches on Kidman's early training as a butcher, providing meat to the miners at Broken Hill, and the purchase of his first cattle station in 1899. Kidman's establishment of the biggest horse sales in the Southern Hemisphere and his friendship with famous bush outfitter Reginald 'RM' Williams provide further opportunities for student research projects and class discussion.

Key Themes & Links to Curriculum Topics

HASS: Humanities & Social Sciences

Inquiry questions/topics for discussion:

Sidney Kidman had a job and left home at age 13. How does this compare with expectations of children in Australia today? Discuss how Australian society compares with other countries where children may still be expected to work and assume responsibilities at a young age.

Sidney Kidman made his living in the Australian outback. He focused his cattle stations on the Channel Country in southwest Queensland where the Cooper Creek and the Diamantina and Georgina rivers created wide flood plains after monsoonal rains in the north of Australia. How does the Channel Country differ from where you live? What makes your area special? What are the grasses, soils and trees unique to your area and how can you look after them?

Kidman had little formal schooling but excelled in his chosen area and became very wealthy. He spent many hours studying and living with cattle and watching their behaviour. Kidman's life story demonstrates that people can achieve in life with perseverance and hard work even if not traditionally academically gifted. Discuss how we can learn outside the classroom by spending time with experts and experienced mentors. Think about mentors that could guide you in your chosen field.

English

Inquiry questions/topics for discussion:

King of the Outback presents a slice of Australian history using distinctive language and terminology specific to the Australian outback. It introduces specific Australian concepts and terms that may be unfamiliar to students today but are part of our national heritage. Identify specific terms or concepts and discuss their meaning e.g. bed roll, tucker bag, hobbles, swag, long paddock.

Find equivalent terms used in other countries and discuss how language evolves over time and place e.g. Akubra (Australia) vs Stetson (USA); drover (Australia) vs cowboy (USA); cattle station (Australia) vs cattle ranch (USA).

Visual Arts

Inquiry questions/topics for discussion:

Different fonts are used throughout *King of the Outback*. Identify the different fonts and discuss their meaning. How are different font styles and sizes used for emphasis throughout the book?

Study Timothy Ide's ink and water colour illustrations. Clever illustrations can add visual literacy to supplement the text of the book. Look for the illustrations of the baby in the birthday rodeo sequences. Discuss how the illustrator has created a visual story of the baby's peril and safe return, which adds to the drama of the rodeo.

Examine the endpapers of the book and discuss how they provide another opportunity to capture the essence of a book. Note how the designer has used gold foil on the cover to enhance the title and to link to the word *King* in the title. Compare to other picture books and discuss how designers use different endpapers and cover details to enhance a story.

About the Author & Illustrator

Kristin Weidenbach (author) and Timothy Ide (illustrator) are the creative team behind *Tom the Outback Mailman*, winner of the Children's Book Council of Australia Eve Pownall award, 2013.

Kristin writes popular non-fiction focused on Australian history. She is the author of the picture book *Meet Banjo Paterson* and the adult titles *Rock Star: the Story of Reg Sprigg* and the Australian bestseller, *Mailman of the Birdsville Track: the Story of Tom Kruse*.

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Timothy has illustrated a number of children's books, among them: Max Fatchen's *A Country Christmas* and Fiona McIntosh's *Fantastica: Shapeshifter* series. He is also known for his court sketching work for the Adelaide TV news networks.

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