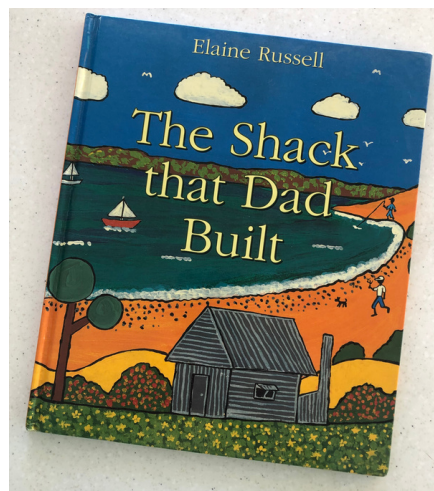




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# Interacting through Reading No 7: The Shack that Dad Built



## Lesson Sequence Overview

[The Shack that Dad Built](#) by Elaine Russell (2005, Little Hare) is the author's recollection of when she was a five year old and her dad built a shack for the family just outside the Aboriginal mission at La Perouse in Sydney. The book contains vivid illustrations to support recounts of specific childhood memories and is suitable for a range of ages. It can be used to investigate life for past generations whilst also considering life for Indigenous communities since white settlement.

The following learning sequence has been designed to maximise interaction and engagement with the book and to consider the role of storytelling and the sharing of memories from an historical perspective. This includes focusing on the role of not only written stories but also oral storytelling. Meanings are considered based on a deep understanding of context and author background and intention. Students are supported through carefully designed tasks before, during and after reading the text. Through the strategies and interactions learning has been designed to link reading and writing through use of the teaching and learning cycle (Derewianka & Jones, 2016 and Rossbridge & Rushton, 2015).

It is necessary to read the book several times before implementing the sequence. The following table summarises strategies designed for interacting with the book.



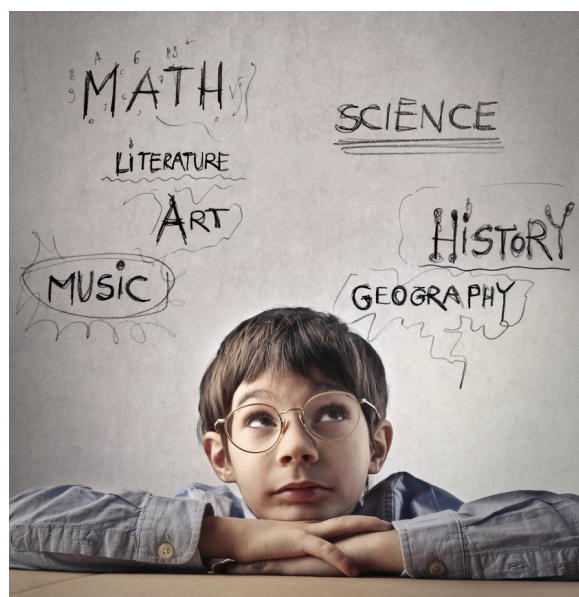
Before Reading	During Reading	After Reading	Writing / Representing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Context for reading</li><li>• Meet the author</li><li>• Spotlight on setting</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading without interruption</li><li>• Reread with think alouds</li><li>• Reread whole text</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purpose and prepositional/ adverbial phrases</li><li>• Word associations</li><li>• Oral history progressive brainstorm</li><li>• Connecting oral histories</li><li>• Memory cline</li></ul>	<p>Purpose: to recount episodes in someone's life as told by that person</p> <p>Process: plan and draft</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modelling / text deconstruction</li><li>• Joint construction</li><li>• Independent construction</li></ul>

## Before Reading

### Context for reading

Many examples of children's literature can be connected to a variety of subject areas. A book can be a wonderful story but with greater understanding of its author/illustrator and context, deeper meanings can be explored across learning areas. When beginning to work with [The Shack that Dad Built](#) by Elaine Russell, show the open back and front cover of the book. Display a list of learning areas or school subjects and ask students to predict which areas might be relevant for a reader engaging with the book. Ask students to justify their ideas. Subjects might include:

- English
- History
- Geography
- Science
- Mathematics
- Creative Arts



### Meet the author

Specific understandings and knowing about the author will assist students with engaging with deeper meanings in the text as students bring their background knowledge, and in particular, knowledge of the context to reading. Tell students that they are going to 'meet' Elaine Russell by watching the video [Artist Elaine Russell](#), produced by the Art Gallery of NSW. Provide students with the list of questions below or

alternatively one question per student. During a first viewing, tell the students to watch and listen only. Replay the video a second time for students to record answers to questions. After viewing students can be placed into groups to share and add to their responses.

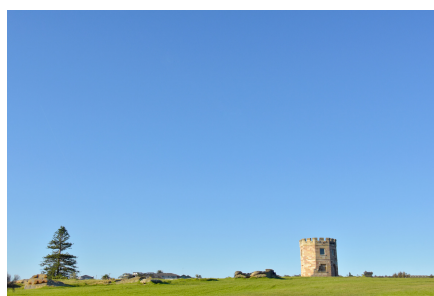
- Where was Elaine Russell born?
- When was Elaine Russell born?
- Where has Elaine Russell lived?
- What does Elaine Russell remember about her childhood?
- What does Elaine Russell mean when she talks about living on a mission?
- Why did Elaine Russell know what a beach looked like?
- Why didn't Elaine's mum let her go to the Philippines?
- What are the features of Elaine's paintings?



Discuss responses to the questions pointing out that the focus is on Elaine Russell's childhood. Show references to place on a map of New South Wales, Australia (eg. Tingha, Moree, Murrin Bridge, Lake Cargellico, Lachlan River, La Perouse). It will also be useful to look at a world map to show the location of the Philippines. Keep the map displayed throughout the learning sequence. Also discuss how this background knowledge might influence the earlier predictions about subject areas through which [The Shack that Dad Built](#) might be viewed.

## Spotlight on setting

After examining the cover image and title, student attention can be drawn more closely to the blurb on the back of the cover where it is revealed that the text takes place by the beach at La Perouse (also known as La Pa) on Dharawal land of southern Sydney. Ask students if this place sounds familiar or if they have ever been to La Perouse. Show photographs of La Perouse next to the open cover image to discuss connections.





Locate La Perouse using [Google maps](#), pointing out its proximity to the city of Sydney and Botany Bay. Also ensure La Perouse is identified on the classroom displayed map. Read the information about Elaine Russell on the inside of the back cover and discuss further connections to what is known so far. Based on the connections ask students to consider the purpose of the text. They might predict that the text is primarily to entertain by telling a story or that it might also be informational or factual by providing information about events that have occurred in the past.

## During Reading

### Reading without interruption

Read the whole text without interruption. Preferably the book is read by the teacher or a reading can be found by watching [The Shack that Dad Built](#) on YouTube.

### Reread with think alouds

Reread [The Shack that Dad Built](#) using think alouds. For example:

- I notice the pattern on the end papers. It looks like the shack on the front cover. It makes me think it might have been made of metal.
- I wonder who the people are and why they look happy to be heading to the shack on the title page.

Throughout the text use think alouds around the following examples:

- I notice a new title on each double page. I think each represents a childhood memory or episode.
- I notice the text is written in first person throughout. Based on what we already know, this seems to be Elaine Russell telling her own story with specific childhood memories through both words and images.
- I can connect these places to our map.
- Parts of Elaine's childhood are described with words giving me clues that the memories take place in a particular historical period, eg, Aborigines, mission (Moving to Sydney). I can also tell this from the images, eg. caravan and horse (The Hand of Friendship), the steam train (Leaving), and lack of building development at La Perouse in the images throughout the episodes.
- I notice that most of the childhood memories are fond or happy but occasionally sad or bittersweet (eg. My Saddest Christmas / Leaving).

### Reread whole text

Read the whole text again without teacher interruption. Students may wish to add their own responses during this reading. The text should be read several additional times throughout the lesson sequence.



# After Reading

## Purpose and prepositional/adverbial phrases

Before considering language resources chosen by a writer, it is important to understand not only contextual information but also the text purpose. Revisit student predictions about the possible purpose of the text again, asking students to justify their thoughts. Tell students that such a text could be described as an historical story or recount as it recounts events or episodes from the past. In particular, it has the features of an autobiography as the author tells of her own life experiences (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). Conduct a discussion around its purpose, particularly as to whether it could be classified as imaginative or informative. Note that it is the opinions of students that matter here as opposed to classifying the text under a rigid category. When we start talking about particular language features we always want to link the discussion of choices back to the context and purpose.

As Elaine Russell shares her childhood memories, she represents much of her experience with the inclusion of detail about the happenings or processes using prepositional/adverbial phrases. These help place the events in the setting of New South Wales initially, to more specifically that of La Perouse and then also to places or locations within the La Perouse area.

Prepositional phrases tend to consist of a preposition plus a noun group (eg. on + the coast). Although they are known as prepositional phrases, depending on their position in a clause they can be adverbial or adjectival. **Adverbials** tell additional information about the **verb or process**. See Humphrey, Droga & Feez (2011), Derewianka (2010) and Rossbridge & Rushton (2010) for further details. Look at this example from early in the book which serves to orientate the reader to the focus on the move to Sydney with the use of **adverbial phrases of place**.

When I was about five we **moved to Sydney** because my father, Clem, had found a job. We **went to live in La Perouse**.

Model locating prepositional/adverbial phrases naming location or place from the beginning of the book until students feel confident. Discuss how these phrases add important information to Elaine Russell's experiences as the notion of place and the activities that occurred there are crucial to her childhood memories. In addition, the choices provide detail to a text that recounts events about particular experiences in a place from the past. After modelling, students in small groups can identify other examples on a selected double page. Compile or provide a range of examples (see below) and relocate within the context of the text, to sort those specific to La Perouse or those naming a broader geographical area. Add those referring to broader New South Wales to the class map. Ask students, in groups with large paper, to draw a map of what they think La Perouse would have been like and then add the remaining prepositional/adverbial phrases telling place/location to their map.

Adverbial phrases telling place			
in Tingha	in our shack	on the beach	down the road
in northern New South Wales	through the lantana	from everywhere	nearby Matraville
in Stony Gully	in the bush	to school	around the campfire
to Sydney	among the dunes	in the schoolyard	from La Perouse
in La Perouse	near the mission	on the wharf	to Central Station
in the mission	on the coast	in the long grass and bush	to our new home
in shacks	from the sea	around the course	out of Sydney
across the bay	on the rocks	outside our shack	to our new house

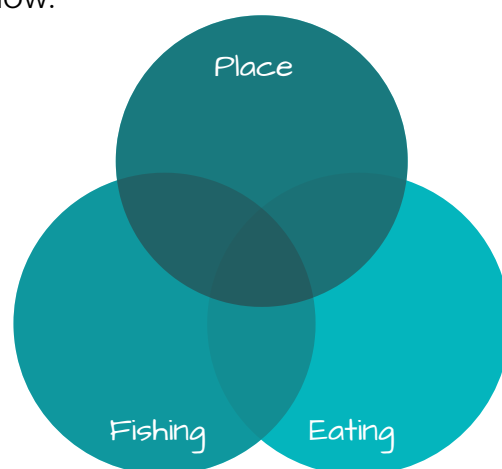
Students share their maps and discuss what influenced their labelling as well as why prepositional phrases functioning as adverbials are so critical in the book. Encourage connections to the purpose of the book. This can be linked back to the History and Geography connections as well as a connection to the role of setting from an English perspective.

## Word associations

Word associations are chains of words which create links across a text and develop cohesion. See Derewianka, (2010) for further explanation. Model identifying chains of meaning making words across one double page, for example, **Fish for Supper**. Record on post it notes and label the image on the page with the words. Explain how these choices build up and organise the ideas across the text. The words can also be arranged into groups based on a particular focus as below.

- Place – coast, sea, rocks, beach, sand
- Fishing – fished, oysters, fishermen, nets, fish
- Eating – food, meals, cook up, fish and oyster curry, damper, supper

These words could also be arranged into a Venn diagram with discussion about how some of the words are associated with more than one idea when read in the text.



## Oral history progressive brainstorm

Ask students how we typically find out about the lives or childhoods of family members and others in the community. Responses may include journals, diaries, photographs, notes, artworks, storytelling etc. Discuss the role of oral storytelling and any examples students have had in their own families. Tell students that historians draw upon oral

histories as a way to collect information and data to develop records about the past.

Display the line from the book to note the role of storytelling in Elaine Russell's childhood.

'That night we sat around a big campfire telling our stories to each other.'  
(The Hand of Friendship)

Remind students of the [video](#) of Elaine Russell and how she was using oral storytelling to tell about her life experiences. Walk through [The Shack that Dad Built](#) again and point out how even though it is written language it has the qualities of oral storytelling as Elaine Russell tells of episodes in her childhood in first person with a focus on events and sharing of memories and feelings. The illustrations/artworks also support the story telling.

Record a different question on several pieces of butcher's paper that could be used to plan for conducting an oral history interview with Elaine Russell. Questions could also be jointly constructed but might include:

What would you ask Elaine Russell about La Perouse?

What would you ask Elaine Russell about her family?

What would you ask Elaine Russell about her childhood?

What would you ask Elaine Russell about her life once she left La Perouse?

What gaps in information would you like to ask Elaine Russell about?

With each piece of butcher's paper and question placed around the classroom, divide students into groups and allocate a particular texta colour. Students rotate through the groups and brainstorm their ideas in their group's colour. On completion, display and discuss the possibilities of topics for oral histories or storytelling. For further ideas on using oral histories in the classroom see [Oral History](#) by Carole Cox (2012).



## Connecting oral histories

In 2021, [Hazelhurst Gallery](#) in Sydney held an exhibition named [Wuliwulawala: Dharawal Women Sharing Stories](#).

'The exhibition featured historical content, interviews and contemporary art which focused on the importance of sharing stories, knowledge and oral histories across generations, while recognising the perspectives of women connected to local and national history.'

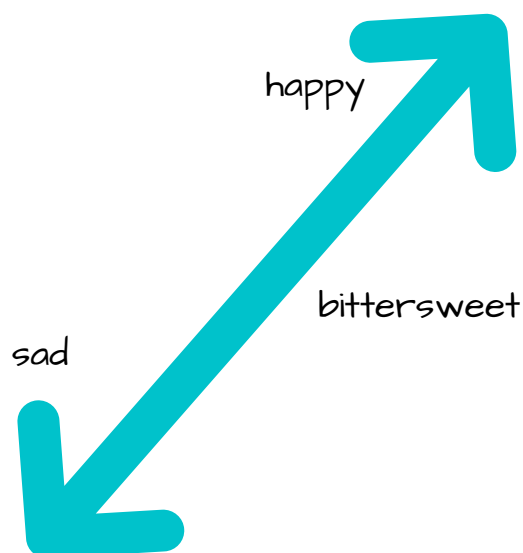
[Hazelhurst Gallery](#).

Many of the artists and contributors in Wuliwulawala were Dharawal women including elders from La Perouse who shared their stories of growing up at La Pa. The stories

have many commonalities with Elaine Russell's [The Shack that Dad Built](#). The video [Wuliwulawala: Growing up in La Pa](#) consists of numerous stories that can be selected based on the needs of students. Select one story and model listening and identifying similarities and differences with Elaine Russell's story. Pause everytime a connection is made. Small groups can then take another of the stories to listen to and also record similarities and differences in recollections. Regroup to share and discuss findings and how oral storytelling can assist in capturing and recording the past for individuals, communities and historians.

## Memory cline

When reading [The Shack that Dad Built](#) and listening to oral storytelling from [Wuliwulawala: Dharawal Women Sharing Stories](#), most memories are happy but others could be interpreted as sad or bittersweet. Tell students that bittersweet means a blend of emotions that are sweet but also tinged with sadness.



Form students into small groups and ask them to locate or recall memories that are happy, sad or bittersweet from [The Shack that Dad Built](#) and [Wuliwulawala: Dharawal Women Sharing Stories](#). Share these events or episodes as a whole class and place them on a cline. Students can justify where each experience might go. This will require students to draw upon and make connections to the context and evidence in and across texts. Focus particularly on those experiences that might be bittersweet and how this interpretation may have changed as the women got older.

## Writing

### Modelling / text deconstruction

Remind students of the purpose of [The Shack that Dad Built](#), in that it seems like a simple story on the surface but knowledge about the context and author help us realise that it is recounting events from the author's life making it autobiographical. Also discuss who Elaine Russell was writing for and how this relates to her choice of both images and written text. This may also involve conversations about the historical context and experiences of Aboriginal people.

Tell students that they are going to write their own autobiographical recount of a particular time and place in their life. As a model text, display a page from [The Shack that Dad Built](#) such as **Fish for Supper**. Point out features including episodes from the past, use of first person, past tense verbs, adverbial phrases of place and word



associations (see after reading strategies) while linking choices to the purpose of the text. Use these features to create criteria for writing which can then be used during joint and independent writing. Groups of students can also take a double page from the book and identify the features listed as criteria.

Criteria for writing:

- the text recounts episodes from the writer's own life
- the text is written in first person from the writer's perspective
- past tense verbs place the events in the past
- adverbial phrases provide detail about place
- word associations or chains build and link the topic.



### Joint construction (planning and drafting)

Tell students that the context for writing will be to recount childhood events or episodes as a way of sharing historical information. Discuss a possible target audience by asking students who they would like to read their writing considering the purpose and context. They may decide to share with classmates, family or to publish as a collection of childhood histories.

Tell students that planning is a critical part of writing and that they are going to help the teacher write an autobiographical recount of an aspect of the teacher's childhood. Revisit the headings across Elaine Russell's book and decide on a heading for an episode. Using oil pastels or other media draw an image of the episode. Whilst drawing talk through the happenings and details. After drawing ask students to help label the image with post it notes with adverbial phrases of place. Using different coloured post it notes, add vocabulary related to the episode. Remove this set of post its and arrange into groups to create word associations. Perhaps use a Venn diagram as in the after reading word associations strategy. Remind students that these words/groups will create the topic but also link to develop the text.

After planning, return to the criteria developed during modelling. Ask students to help jointly construct a draft recount related to the teacher's episode. As the subject matter is based on the teacher's memory and planning, encourage students to contribute in regard to language choices with reference to the criteria. After drafting, review the text in terms of the criteria.

The purpose of joint construction is to handover to the students so there should be 50/50 participation between the teacher and students. This will require the teacher to take the role of facilitator and guide the conversation about the text based on the modelling and metalanguage used during the modelling/deconstruction lesson. This can be achieved through thinking aloud, posing open questions and pausing to invite students into the conversation. Other strategies such as think, pair, share and writing ideas on mini whiteboards as well as sharing the pen are useful for ensuring joint participation in the process.

## Independent construction (planning and drafting)

Remind students of the purpose for writing and their target audience, emphasising the need to provide historical episodes for the reader about their own childhood. Before planning for writing place students in oral history storytelling circles where they can take turns sharing their stories as part of planning. Encourage students to give each other feedback on which episodes would be best to write about. This will help them develop ideas, language and ultimately decide which childhood memories they will write about.

Remind students of the planning process:

1. Draw your event/experience.



2. Label your drawing with adverbial phrases of place/location.



3. Label your drawing with vocabulary about the episode. Remove the words and group to create word associations.



4. Select a heading for your episode.

After planning remind students of the criteria for writing. Students use their planning to independently write their text. After writing, students self and peer assess or conference with the teacher based on the criteria. Students can repeat this process to focus on additional episodes to develop their own autobiography. Discuss next steps in terms of sharing and publishing based on who the class has identified as the target audience.

## References

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