

## Book Club Notes

### Dark Emu. Black Seeds: agriculture or accident

written by Bruce Pascoe

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#### ABOUT THE BOOK

*Dark Emu. Black seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* puts forward an argument for a reconsideration of the hunter-gatherer tag for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians. The evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing – behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag. Rupert Gerritsen and Bill Gammage in their latest books support this premise but Pascoe takes this a step further and challenges the hunter-gatherer tag as a convenient lie.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Pascoe is a Bunurong man born in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond. He is a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria and has been the director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission. Pascoe has had a varied career as a teacher, farmer, fisherman, barman, fencing contractor, lecturer, Aboriginal language researcher, archaeological site worker and editor. In 2013, his novel, *Fog a Dox* won the 2013 Prime Ministers Literary Award for YA Fiction.

#### REVIEWS AND QUOTES

"This is an important book that advances a powerful argument for re-evaluating the sophistication of Aboriginal peoples' economic and socio-political livelihoods, and calls for Australia to embrace the complexity, sophistication and innovative skills of Indigenous people into its concept of itself as a nation."

– Dr. Michael Davis, Honourary Research Fellow at University of Sydney

"a remarkable book"

– Max Allen, *The Australian*

"This very readable, strongly argued study turns the accepted notion of the Aborigines as a hunter-gatherer people completely on its head."

– Steven Carroll, *Sydney Morning Herald*

#### THEMES

- Indigenous Culture

- Connection to country and place, a trust in and respect for tradition, respect for elders, family, rules and community, indigenous languages, indigenous land use and food gathering techniques.
- Pastoral Industry
  - The pastoral industry often mistreated Indigenous people and many pastoralists used force or violent means to run them off their ancestral lands, particularly in prime farming regions.
  - The pastoral industry often failed to recognise any traditional ties various Aboriginal groups had to the land.
- Australian History
  - Indigenous people often experienced injustice and discrimination during colonial times.
  - Aboriginal people used ingenuity in terms of farming techniques.
  - Missions and government departments often did not serve the best interests of Indigenous people.

## FOR DISCUSSION

1. Australia has vastly contrasting environments and landscapes with different types of natural materials from which 'homes' were built. Discuss the various shelters that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people used in different seasons. The Bureau of Meteorology website contains information about various Indigenous seasonal calendars from around Australia. <http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/walabunnba/index.shtml>
2. In the past, Aboriginal people didn't build the types of houses we live in today. Why?
3. How do traditional Aboriginal seasons compare with the European seasons that have been adopted in Australia?
4. The author, Bruce Pascoe, believes that the early settlers, authorities and explorers did not present the evidence of the farming techniques and established Aboriginal communities because it would have proved previous ownership and usage by Aboriginal people. He believes that this would not have been beneficial for the European settlers in their choice for establishing colonies on prime land areas throughout Australia. Discuss his point of view. Why might this not have been widely reported previously?
5. Discuss the way in which Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander knowledge about native Australian animals assist them?
6. What can be learnt from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people about native animals and plants that could be used to protect Australian flora and fauna, particularly endangered species?
7. How would the experiences of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compare with the lives of newly arrived English settlers? Discuss the perspectives of those whose land was taken away or overrun with cattle and sheep. Discuss the implications of 'white' farming on the history and culture of Indigenous people.

8. Kangaroo meat is relatively new to mainstream meat markets but has long been part of Aboriginal traditions. Discuss the way in which Aboriginal people farmed and harvested kangaroos.
9. Discuss traditional hunting techniques of Indigenous people living in or around your area.