

Teacher Notes

Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance

Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorunmurra

SYNOPSIS

Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance is the true story of the powerful resistance put forth by Aboriginal freedom fighter, Jandamarra, in the closing years of the nineteenth century. To protect the Bunuba people of the Kimberley region, Jandamarra courageously and cleverly manoeuvred an opposition to the final stages of white invasion in Australia.

Historian Howard Pedersen has interwoven written records including many primary source documents from the era with the oral history of the Bunuba people as told by Banjo Woorunmurra. The end result is an insightful and detailed account of the remarkable struggle against the many injustices suffered by the Indigenous peoples of Western Australia at the hands of white colonists, government officials and the police force.

Most outstanding about *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* is the heroic and spiritual leadership of Jandamarra, a man whom his own countrymen greatly respected and regarded as a warrior with the gifts of magic and immortality. This he earned through his actions and pure courage. Indeed, Jandamarra is both legend and hero, a pivotal character in Australia's past, present and future.

THEMES

Heroes and Legends

- Jandamarra is a true hero, putting himself in grave danger to resist the colonisation of Bunuba country
- The Jandamarra legend is one that is integral to the history and culture of Australia

Relationships and Community

- As a youngster, Jandamarra was ostracised from the Bunuba community after failing to adhere to cultural laws of kin and skin. He rose from this banishment however to become revered as a spiritual leader and immortal legend

- Jandamarra risked his own life to save those of his people, including his mother
- The Bunuba women nursed Jandamarra back to health after he was wounded by gunfire
- Jandamarra freed Bunuba prisoners by using the settler's weapons

Courage and Perseverance

- Against adversity, Jandamarra led a well calculated and largely non-violent resistance against a brutal and hostile opponent.
- Jandamarra was selfless and courageous in his leadership against the planned takeover of Bunuba country by pastoralists.
- Never giving up, Jandamarra continued the resistance even when mortally wounded.

Invasion and Colonisation

- The Western Australian Government was so concerned with gaining its independence from Britain that economic viability and policing the Kimberley district overshadowed the upholding of Aboriginal rights as stipulated under British law.
- Colonists saw the complete submissiveness of the local Aboriginal people as ideal. This was to be gained through the use of arms and aggression.
- Sheep and cattle were introduced to Bunuba country as this was prime grazing land. This land included many sacred sites of the Bunuba people.
- Many Indigenous people were enslaved by pearlers.

Law and Order

- Ineffective policing policy and strategies led to the slaughtering of thousands of indigenous people during this time. Written records of the time do not reflect these atrocities.
- Countless others were captured, chained and imprisoned having not committed any crimes. Some prisoners were used as 'black troopers' to assist the police in controlling the vast Kimberley region. Others were used as labour gangs to build infrastructure.

WRITING STYLE

Written in third person, past tense, *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* is an exceptionally well-researched historical account of this period of Australian history. Howard Pedersen incorporates many quotes and extracts from primary source documents including newspaper reports, government documents and records as well as letters from the time. This combined with the oral history from Bunuba countryman, Banjo Woorunmurra, provides a complete, extremely detailed text that uses cause and effect to help lay the foundations of a most extraordinary story.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-reading Activities

Well-known Australian musician, Paul Kelly, is quoted on the front cover of *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* as calling Jandamarra, 'a true Australian hero'

- Discuss what it means to be a true hero
- In small groups, define what you see as being essential characteristics of a hero in this context
- What examples of Australian heroes do you know? What has made these people heroes?
- Reflect on this definition during your reading. Add examples of Jandamarra's actions that help to classify him as a hero
- The foreword written by Bunuba woman, June Oscar, explains briefly the importance of Jandamarra to both the Bunuba community as well as to Australia in a wider context. She mentions the many ways in which Jandamarra's story has been represented through dance, picture books, film and plays. She also makes the point that, 'he stands as a unifying figure — a champion of justice who can be admired by all Australians'.
 - Discuss June Oscar's comment after reading *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*
 - View a trailer of the ABC's documentary *Jandamarra's War* <http://treatypublic.net/node/702>. This program is available for purchase from ABC. Consider viewing after reading the text, comparing the film with *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*.
 - View examples of art, poetry and songs inspired by the Jandamarra story.
- Compare versions of Jandamarra's story across a variety of websites, taking note of similarities and differences
 - Revise effective search techniques and search terms when using the internet. Discuss differences in domains (eg com, net, gov, org, edu)
 - Cross-reference the information found on sites such as those below with Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorunmurra's account in *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*:
 - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jandamarra> Wikipedia
 - <http://www.jandamarra.com.au/> Jandamarra website (Bunuba community)
 - <http://www.kimberleyaustralia.com/story-of-jandamarra.html> Kimberley Australia
 - <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1204849.htm> ABC Television
 - www.sdwk.wa.gov.au/community/history.Html Shire of Derby/West Kimberley
 - http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/component/option,com_hotproperty/task,view/id,44/ Tunnel Creek National Park: The story of Jandamarra

Reading the text

- The introduction provides a glimpse into the unfolding guerrilla warfare launched by Jandamarra. It sets the scene for what becomes a gruelling and disturbing period in Australian history
 - Jandamarra was described as being 'semi-civilised', being caught between both the 'black and white' worlds of his time. What clues are we given in the introduction that Jandamarra and indeed the Kimberley region was caught between these two worlds?
 - What can we ascertain from the introduction about the Bunuba people's connection with their land?
 - What questions are raised after reading the introduction? Note these questions and return to them as your reading continues
- Colonisation of the Kimberley region introduced a variety of threats to the Indigenous owners. What were these threats and how did they impact on the original inhabitants?
- British law at the time determined that Aboriginal people of any land had, 'an incontrovertible right to their own soil: a plain and sacred right,' (p21) however this right was largely ignored. Discuss the implications of this law and the way in which it was abused by the early colonists.
- Re-read the passage on p28 that clearly explains the religious significance that links Aboriginal people with their land. In your own words, explain the underlying beliefs and principles of this crucial relationship.
- The Colonist's method of intimidating and threatening the Indigenous people through the use of weapons contrasted strongly with a society structured around spiritual and religious status. Compare the different approaches to leadership of the white colonists and squatters with those of the Bunuba people.
- Pedersen makes the point that had the white settlers respected and avoided the sacred sites of the Bunuba people, many of the violent clashes might have been avoided. The Bunuba people wanted to protect these sites from expanding pastoralisation. Explain the significance behind these sacred sites (p44-46).
- The law system of Western Australia at the time allowed for the imprisonment of Indigenous people, even those who had committed no crimes. Write a reflection on this system of law.
- Prisoners were often used to help track other Indigenous people, sometimes even their fellow countrymen. Why did this system largely fail?
- What role did Ellemarra play in shaping Jandamarra?
- The Bunuba described the police as 'Darrali: literally agitated king brown snake'. (p52) What was meant by this description? Give examples from the text to help clarify your answer.
- Lukin was at first opposed to the outlawing of fires being deliberately lit until his own stock perished in bushfires. (p55) What does this backflip reveal about Lukin's character?

- Re-read p57 concerning Western Australia's attempt to gain independence from Britain. What were the conditions under which the colony could gain independence? How did this shape policy and actions during the 1890s?
- Governor Broome saw that the mismanagement of stations was more of a problem than the sheep-killing committed by the Bunuba people. (p60-61). What did he mean by this?
- Many images of key locations in the Jandamarra story are included in Chapter 2. Look carefully at these photographs and art works. You may need to return to these images as you are reading the text.
 - Using Google Maps or Google Images, search for photographs of places such as *Bandilngan* (Windjana Gorge), *Balili* (limestone) Napier Range, *Milawundi* (King Leopold Ranges), *Bandaral ngarri* (Fitzroy River), *Baraa* (Tunnel Creek), *Ganimbiri* (Oscar Range), *Limalurru* (Lillimooloora) Station homestead and Derby.
 - Create a photo journal of the Bunuba resistance using Microsoft Movie Maker or Photo Story to reflect your understanding of the events leading up to Jandamarra's death.
 - Find these locations on a map of Western Australia to help gain a better understanding of the time and place associated with the text.
- It has been argued that Jandamarra was caught between the white world in which he'd been living and that of his people. Do you agree with this argument? Why? How did this shape Jandamarra's life?
- What indication do we get about Jandamarra's character from Chapter 3? How did the events surrounding his upbringing contribute to his eventual leadership of the Bunuba people?
- Aboriginal people were offered protection at the expense of their freedom. Many opted for a life of servitude to the white invaders for fear of their own safety. This led to a number of Aboriginal people who drifted between the two cultures. How did this situation lead to further unrest?
- Explain how Jandamarra managed to rise from the status of a once-banished Bunuba man to that of unprecedented warrior and leader.
- Jandamarra shows unrivalled bravery and persistence in the face of adversity. What obstacles did he face and how were these overcome?
- Colonisation, the police and the grazing of sheep were enough of a threat to the Bunuba people. How did the discovery of gold in the southern regions of Western Australia further threaten these already vulnerable people?
- The introduction of cattle was another contributing factor to the wars between white settlers and Aboriginal people of the Kimberley region. Discuss the impact of cattle grazing on an already futile situation.
- Discuss the ways in which the floods that swept through the region as described in Chapter 4 further increased tension.
- Calls were made to employ the Queensland Native Police Force system (p112). What was this system and why was this considered a possible strategy by the desperate WA police force?

- There is evidence that press coverage of many of the atrocities experienced by the Indigenous people of the Kimberley region were heavily censored.
 - Investigate censorship laws of this era and compare with those of today
 - What other examples of media censorship occurred around this time, especially with regards to Indigenous issues in Australia?
 - Research other instances of censorship throughout history and the impact this had on the victims of such events
- Describe Jandamarra's strategies as a gifted military leader. Why was he thought to be able to turn himself into a bird and disappear like a ghost? How did his 'cat and mouse' approach work to frustrate and elude his enemy?
- Jandamarra had the opportunity to take many more lives than he did, for example when he chose not to kill Pilmer (Chapter 9). Discuss his decisions to be as non-violent as possible. What does this reveal about Jandamarra and how does this contribute to his status as a 'true Australian hero'?
- Re-read the Epilogue (especially p204) that gives extracts and analysis of the Police Commissioner's report of the war against Jandamarra. Why was there so much police propaganda that falsified events?
- One of the important legacies of the Jandamarra story is the survival and positive future of today's Bunuba people. Re-read p206-207. How has traditional life and culture returned to this region today? What challenges still lie ahead for the Bunuba people? How might these most effectively be addressed?
- How has the Mabo Native Title case impacted on the Bunuba people and other Indigenous groups?
- Re-read the extract from Prime Minister Paul Keating's speech on p208. Why do you think Howard Pedersen has included this passage in his epilogue? What is the significance of this speech on the future of Indigenous communities in Australia?

Post-reading activities

- 'They call him a black Ned Kelly. In the Kimberley, Jandamarra is an outlaw to some and a warrior to others.'
(<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/rewind/txt/s1204849.htm> ABC Television)
 - Discuss this statement, comparing Jandamarra with Ned Kelly. Is this a just comparison or a misunderstanding of each character's actions and roles in Australian history? Give sound reasons to support your opinion.
- Listen to the audio of the ABC's Radio National program with director of *Jandamarra's War*, Mitch Torres
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/awaye/stories/2011/3214204.htm>
 - In pairs, create your own radio interview and commentary between a journalist and someone connected with the Jandamarra story. This could be a contemporary artist, poet, songwriter or film maker. Similarly, it could be with one of the characters from the actual time of this story.

- Select a chapter of *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* on which to write and perform a dramatization.
- Write a letter to the editor or a newspaper article that reflects on your reading of *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance*.
- Investigate stories of Aboriginal freedom fighters similar to Jandamarra such as Pemulwuy, Windradyne, Yagan and Dundalee.
- Listen to songs about Jandamarra such as *Fly Away Pigeon* by Lucy Cox (Chinatown Music, Broome).
- Compose your own piece of music or poem about the Jandamarra story.