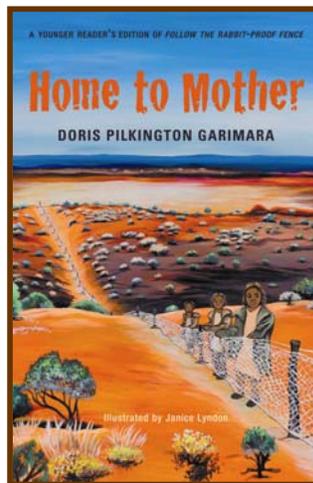


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# HOME TO MOTHER

## Doris Pilkington Garimara



### Teachers' Notes

### Written by Doris Pilkington Garimara

ISBN: 978 07022 3546 7 / AU\$16.95

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About the Book	2
Group Activities	2
Historical Background	2
Geography	2
The Journey	3
Drawing the Story Together	3
About the Author	3

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**ABOUT THE BOOK**

This is the real life story of three young girls, sisters, Mollie and Gracie, and their cousin Daisy, forcibly taken from their home at Jigalong in the Little Sandy Desert of Western Australia to the Moore River Native Settlement. This was not uncommon as it was government policy at the time to remove children of mixed race parentage from their Aboriginal mothers. It was believed they would be better off raised in hostels where they could receive an education of sorts. This belief was challenged at the time and growing concern saw the policy eventually abandoned.

What was unusual about these three girls was that they escaped from the settlement and made their way safely home walking 1500 miles across unknown country.

Home to Mother is an abridged junior version of *The Rabbit Proof Fence* written by the daughter of one of the girls. The book was filmed in 2002 and teacher's notes for the film—and the book—can be downloaded from:

<http://www.eniar.org/news/pdfs/Rabbit-proofFence.pdf>

These notes may be too detailed for primary students but are an invaluable teacher resource.

The story has historical significance; is a useful reference for studies of Aboriginal and Intercultural studies and is, in itself, an exciting survival tale.

**GROUP ACTIVITIES****Historical background:**

1. Research the history of the Stolen Generation. Valuable nonfiction sources are *They Took the Children* by David Hollinsworth and *Lowitja* by Lowitja O'Donoghue (both Working Title Press). The fictional story *The Burnt Stick* by Anthony Hill (Puffin) recounts the story of what one Aboriginal woman did in order to hide her child from the government officers.

**Geography**

1. Research Jigalong: natural flora and fauna, climate, geography. Jigalong School has a website with photographs of the area. They provide an idea of the countryside.  
[http://www.teachlive.org.au/jigalong\\_remote\\_community\\_school](http://www.teachlive.org.au/jigalong_remote_community_school)
2. Draw a map of Western Australia noting Jigalong; Moore River; Perth and the old rabbit proof fence. Where possible, identify climatic zones, different types of country—the plants and animals and agriculture.

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**The Journey**

1. Identify the survival strategies the girls used to:

- (i) cover their tracks
- (ii) find food
- (iii) chart their direction
- (iv) keep warm
- (v) stay healthy

What does this tell you about their upbringing—check the first chapter for the teaching methods of the older Aboriginal women. Also discuss why the girls were happier when they reached country they knew.

2. From the story were all the people involved in the story of both European and Aboriginal descent trying to help the girls? In what ways?
3. Look at the end of the story where Billy keeps watch for the girls. Why have the mothers set up a hidden camp?
4. Discuss how well you know the girls by the end of their journey.
5. Discuss what parts of the story you found most exciting.

**DRAWING THE STORY TOGETHER**

Using what you have learned from reading *Home to Mother* produce a short sketch in which students take the parts of various characters, each one giving their opinion (in character) of the journey and why the girls felt the need to escape the settlement and return home.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Doris Pilkington's traditional name is Nugi Garimara. She was born in 1937 on Balfour Downs Station in the East Pilbara, homeland of her Mardu ancestors. As a toddler she was removed by authorities from her home at the station, along with her mother Molly Craig and baby sister Anna, and committed to Moore River Native Settlement. This was the same institution Molly had escaped from ten years previously, the account of which is told in *Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence*.

At eighteen, Doris left the mission system as the first of its members to qualify for the Royal Perth Hospital's nursing aide training program. Following marriage and a family, she studied journalism and worked in film/video production. *Caprice: A Stockman's Daughter*, originally published in 1991, is her first book and won the 1990 Unaipon Award. Her second book *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* was first published in 1996 and has been reprinted several times since the international release of the film 'Rabbit-Proof Fence' in 2002. Doris has travelled extensively throughout the world with the film's director Phillip Noyce. *Under the Wintamarra Tree*, her third book and the story of her journey back to

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her family and traditional homeland, was launched in 2002. She is Co-Patron of State and Federal Sorry Day Committees' Journey of Healing and has toured extensively in Australia and throughout the world.

An excerpt from *Caprice* appears in *Fresh Cuttings*, UQP's first Black Australian Writing, due for release in October 2003.

Awards won by Doris (Garimara) Pilkington include:

Under the Wintamarra Tree

Western Australian Premiers Book Awards - Non-fiction (2003)  
Shortlisted

Follow the Rabbit Proof Fence

Brisbane City Councils One Book One Brisbane (2003)