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Students 'Say Something'

Julian Laffan reports from St Bede's

GOOD COLLABORATIONS require conversation. The development of an artwork takes time and energy not only in the making but in all stages. An open forum allows ideas and images to merge together before anything is made. This talking and listening is an important part of the process. Co-ordinating 28 children to make one artwork took quite a few in depth lessons. The concept of Reconciliation was investigated as were Aboriginal sites of significance and important practices and technologies.

We revisited Uncle Max Dulumunmun Harrison's book *'My People's Dreaming'* and from that we recognised the importance of this local Braidwood region to the Yuin people. Other tribes as well, for thousands of years, have managed the land and animals, created walking highways, and maintained significant sites.

The children were surprised to hear stories of conflict — and that inequality still exists between Aboriginal and other Australians.

The 2013 theme for the Reconciliation Challenge was 'Say Something'. The Year 5/6 children from Mrs Germaine Hannaford and Mrs Katie Tooth's class at St Bede's Braidwood worked with Kinder teacher/Assistant Principal Mr Julian Laffan during Friday afternoon creative arts rotations.

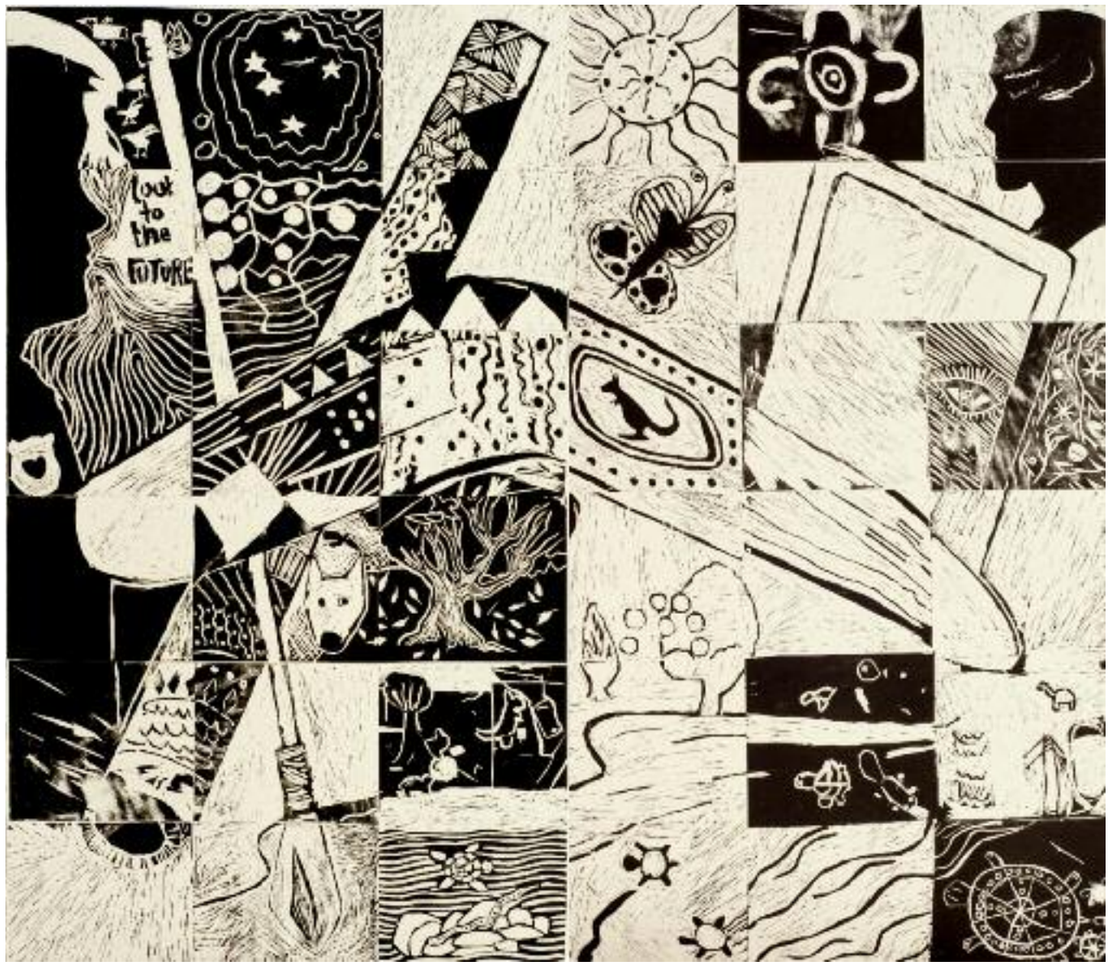
The children created a multiple panel lino print that measures 900mm x 800mm and depicts the student's ideas relating to the value of Aboriginal knowledge and the continual and successful management and relationship with the plants, animals and resources of the Braidwood region.

While exploring themes and possible content, the children drew. We had three lessons just drawing. All ideas were acceptable and brought to the group for discussion. Gradually the concepts were refined and drawings started to talk to one another. The children voted on which components would be included and we worked from there.

Isabella Culmone (Yr 6) suggested the boomerang could represent Mt Gillamatong and from there came the inclusion of land, water as the Shoalhaven River and the sky. These are the elements shared by all animals and people. The interest in technology led to the inclusion of the spear, boomerang and the iPad. They're extensions of conversations that explored technologies past and present to lead the viewer to shared understandings in the future. One of our Aboriginal students, Declan, called across to Ella, "Look to the future"! This became the title of the work.

One of our Aboriginal parents, Richard, visited the classroom to see how the work was developing. He gave children feedback and asked them about their ideas. He drew the meeting place on a lino tile and one of the children cut it out. As he said, "we need somewhere to meet together".

Each student was then given a tile of



their choice. Land, water or sky. The outlines of the boomerang, didgeridoo and spear were cut up and dispersed. Students then had to communicate with the other children who had surrounding tiles. This was a complicated jigsaw with the information evolving as it went. Turtles, kangaroos, dingoes, ancient trees, birds and people started to appear.

Patterns, lines and marks developed and crossed into neighbouring tiles. This process was up to the children to work out and resulted in some impressive connections within the work.

The class learnt the new skills of cutting and printing and took to using lino and the tools quickly. Braidwood kids are used to using their hands and found the process a rewarding one. Some of the cutting is extremely detailed. The more confident cutters made two or more tiles. The children made multiple prints by hand using wooden spoons.

The final print was made on an electric etching press and this was the revelation of all the individual pieces really coming together. The result is a bold graphic statement to 'Say Something' toward reconciliation and the future.

The students made the work with the intention of perhaps being exhibited at the Australian Museum Sydney and were amazed when they won the Primary category of the competition across New South Wales. Principal Gerard Galvin, staff and students travelled to Sydney to the Australian Museum on Friday the 31st of May to receive their certificates. The exhibition will be held until the end of August. The exhibition was opened by the Hon. Peter Garrett MP and, the Assistant Director of the Australian Museum.

The children travelled to Sydney to receive their award and to see the work on display at the Australian Museum. This was a big event for the small town of Braidwood, and a significant work to communicate a sense of hope for the continuing Reconciliation movement.

This is the description of the artwork as it appears in the catalogue.

This artwork is about our local region, Yuin country and the important place of Aboriginal people as the original custodians of the land and the keepers of knowledge and tradition. The artwork is looking forwards to a positive future for all people and animals; one in which we can move forward and learn together. The boomerang is Mt Gillamatong which is central to our local area. Animals and plants are interspersed between tools, past, current and future including iPads, boomerangs and spears. Our artwork explores the importance of traditional technologies and knowledge of ecology in land management.

Our artwork is a statement about the importance of relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people. It recognises the importance of Aboriginal knowledge and connection to land, and the important place of technology in empowering the reconciliation movement. Aboriginal people deserve to be recognised. We need to meet together.