

Example text: Dreaming story

Emu and Jabiru

Long long ago in the Dreamtime, when the land was new, Gandji and his family, and Wurrpan and his family lived at a place by the sea, called Nurrurrumba, in the far north of Australia.

Gandji and his children would often go down to the sea to fish. One day, they were fishing for stingray in the warm, salt water. As they waded through the shallow crystal clear water, they speared all sorts of stingrays and brought them back to the shore.

The children gathered driftwood and built a fire on the beach, over which they cooked the stingrays, separating the meat from the fat. They wrapped the meat in some strips of bark and took it back to their camp just over the sand dunes.

Back at the camp, Wurrpan sent one of his children over to Gandji to collect their share of the stingrays. But when Wurrpan unwrapped the parcel of bark he realised that Gandji had kept the sweet, fresh stingray meat and had given Wurrpan and his family the old, tasteless pieces.

Nevertheless, Wurrpan and his children ate what they had been given. When they had finished their meal, Wurrpan got up and went to talk to Gandji.

“Why did you keep the sweet, fresh stingrays for your own family, while you gave my family the old, tasteless ones?” he shouted.

However, Gandji argued “You should not have stayed in camp then. Maybe you should have gone fishing yourself if you are not happy with what we gave you.”

The brothers-in-law continued to argue as both their tempers rose. Finally, Gandji got so frustrated that he grabbed some hot coals from the fire and threw them at Wurrpan.

But even then he was still angry. So he picked up a Buyburu, a smooth rock for grinding nuts, and threw this at Wurrpan too. The Buyburu hit Wurrpan hard on his chest.

After realising what he had done to his brother-in-law, Gandji was fearful of what Wurrpan would now do to him.

He was so worried that he started to jump up and down and flap around. Each time he jumped he went higher and higher into the air until he turned into a Jabiru, but without a beak.

Wurrpan was angry at Gandji for what he had done, and he thought that he might fly away and escape, so he called to his children to help him.

They gave him his spear, called Wandhawarri Djimbarrmirri, which he threw at Gandji while flying around above him.

The spear hit Gandji in the behind and went right through his body until it poked out of his face. This gave Gandji, the Jabiru, his beak.

Now it was Wurrpan’s turn to be afraid of what would happen next. He gathered his children to him and together they ran inland, away from the sea. As they were running as fast as they could, they began to change into emus.

The ash from the hot coals that Gandji had thrown turned their feathers grey and the Buyburu stone had left a bump on the front of their chest where it had hit.

Today, the people of Arnhem Land, Yolngu, remember the story of Wurrpan and Gandji. When they cook emu meat, it is only half-cooked and they carefully wipe off the ash from the fire before they eat it. While even today, the emu’s eggs are the same shape as the Buyburu stone that hit it.

NOTE: This story comes from the Marrkula clan in Arnhem land. They are members of the Gapuwiyak people

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