

Example text: Dreaming story

Thukeri – The bony bream

A long time ago in the Dreaming, when only Aboriginal people lived in Australia, the Ngurunderi spirit ancestor came down and created the Ngarrindjeri people and their lands in what we now call South Australia.

One day, two Ngarrindjeri men went to go fishing in the lake. They took with them their bark canoe and baskets woven from the long rushes that grew by the lake. The men liked to fish in Loveday Bay where the water was cool and calm, and fish were plenty. The most delicious fish of all was the Thukeri (bream).

While they were fishing, the men's wives and children were searching the nearby bushland, collecting tasty vegetables and edible plants for their evening meal.

Knowing that they had plenty of time, the two men settled down among a clump of tall reeds, sheltered from the wind. Carefully they strung their sharp, bird bone hooks onto their fishing lines (nungi) and began to fish. As the sun began to sink down over the sky, the men stopped fishing and looked down into their bark canoe to see that it was almost overflowing with beautiful, juicy Thukeri.

They decided that they had enough fish for their people so they paddled the canoe back to the shores of the lake. Upon their return, the two men noticed a stranger coming towards them. What did he want with them? Was he hungry? Would he want a share of their big, delicious Thukeri?

The men were worried. They did not want to share their catch and they hastily covered the fish lying in the bottom of the canoe so that the stranger would not know how successful their fishing trip had been.

As the stranger approached the two men, he greeted them and said, "I have walked far today. It is growing late and I am hungry. Would you be able to spare me a couple of your fish?"

Slowly the two men glanced at the mats covering the fish in the bottom of the canoe.

Then they said to the stranger, "We are sorry brother, but our wives and children are hungry too. We did not do well today. We only caught a few small fish, barely enough to feed our people who are depending on us. We cannot give you any."

As he turned to walk away, the stranger glared at the two men.

"You are lying. There are more than enough fish in your canoe to feed your people. You have been greedy and because of this you shall never again enjoy eating Thukeri."

And with that he turned and walked off into the bush.

The two men looked at each other and then stared after the stranger, wondering what he had meant. Yet they were not too concerned. What could he possibly do? He had gone as quickly as he had appeared.

Without a further thought, they pulled the reed mats off the fish and began to clean and gut them by the water's edge. However, as they began to work, they discovered that their tender, juicy Thukeri were full of thin, sharp bones, making them impossible to eat.

The two men were now truly worried.

"What have we done?" they moaned. "Our families will choke on these bones; we can't take these fish home to eat."

Shamefully the two men returned to their camp with their baskets of bony fish and told their families of the stranger and what had happened. The tribal elders told them that the stranger had really been their spirit ancestor Ngurunderi and that they had displeased him with their greed. Now their people would be punished forever, unable to eat the Thukeri.

Whenever the Ngarrindjeri people catch a bony bream today, they remember the story of the two greedy men and the lesson that the Great Spirit Ngurunderi taught them.

Notes: This story comes from the Ngarrindjeri clan from The Murray River area of South Australia.