



**Author:** Thomas Higgs with Colin Hall  
**Illustrated:** Wally Wilfred  
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#### Blurb

This is a **mengi mengi nanggaya** (longtime olden time story). Of Alawa life, interrupted by the arrival of **yinangarrwuna** (ghostly) strangers and their hooved companions. Of one man's bravery and grace in crocodile-infested **marraman** (flood-water). Of a bronze medal with a red and white silk ribbon. This is the story of Ayaiga.

#### About the creators

Thomas Higgs is a teacher and award-winning portrait artist living in Darwin. He enjoys painting, gardening and visiting friends in remote communities across the Northern Territory. He would like to see all Australians learning about our rich First Nations history and culture and regards collaboration like this book as an act of reconciliation.

Colin Hall is an Alawa man from the Roper River region. He works at the Ngukurr Language Centre supporting the delivery of Kriol language courses and is also working to revive the endangered Alawa language of his ancestors. He assisted Higgs in the writing of Ayaiga's story through the inclusion of many Alawa and Kriol words.

Wally Wilfred is a Wägilak man and artist living and working in the Roper River region, who works with the Ngukurr Art Centre. Wally brings together traditional techniques with bold and contemporary use of colour. Wally's work explores traditional and present-day culture with history and storytelling.

## AYAIGA: NEIGHBOUR AND HERO

### Teachers' Notes

Recommended for: Years 6-8

#### Learning Areas

- HASS (Humanities and Social Sciences)
- AC9HC8K06 - different experiences of, perspectives on and debates about Australia's national identity and citizenship, including the perspectives of First Nations Australians as owners of their respective nations, and of different migrant groups
- AC9HS6K06 - the key institutions of Australia's system of government, how it is based on the Westminster system, and the key values and beliefs of Western democracies
- AC9HG8K03 - the spiritual, aesthetic and cultural value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Country/Place of First Nations Australians
- AC9HG8K04 - the interconnections between human activity and geomorphological processes, and ways of managing distinctive landscapes
- AC9HH7S06 - identify perspectives, attitudes and values of the past in sources
- AC9HH7K07 - the cultural obligations of First Nations Australians about significant heritage sites, including ancestral remains, material culture and artefacts, and the role of collaboration between First Nations Australians and other individuals and groups to ensure cultural preservation.

#### General capabilities

- Critical and Creative Thinking
- Literacy
- Personal and Social Capability
- Ethical Understanding
- Cross-curriculum priorities
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Sustainability

#### LEARNING ACTIVITIES

##### The cultural obligations of First Nations Australians about significant heritage sites

The beginning of the story (page 3) describes Ayaiga's homeland and how he was taught to care for it by his Elders.

- What do you notice about the significance and the value of the landscape to the Alawa people?
- How might the Alawa view of the land differ from that of the 'light-skinned' European pastoralists who were moving into the country?

Research the impact of cloven-hooved animals, such as horses and cattle on the Australian landscape.



**The role of collaboration between First Nations Australians and other individuals and groups to ensure cultural preservation**

The Roper River and its tributaries are a life source for the people of this region, including Alawa people. The use of this water is in contention as the interests of settlers continue to clash with those of the traditional custodians.

Use these websites and articles to explore how modern technology and traditional knowledge are being applied to map the river system and work towards its preservation for future generations:

- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-19/northern-territory-water-cotton-mataranka-springs-four-corners/104187666>
- <https://songlinesaustralia.com/exhibitions/exhibition-aqua-nullius-20-8-8-9/>
- <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-10-28/nt-ngukurr-traditional-owners-map/101588434>

**Sustainability**

What cultural obligations does Darren Farrell, grandson of Ayaiga, have as a custodian of Alawa Country?

Watch this clip of Darren continuing the fight to protect Alawa Country: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GMGgLTIMM5w>

**Reflect on culture and cultural diversity**

Thomas and Colin worked together to write this story down in the European way, with words on paper, but for the past century the story was being handed down in other ways. Explore oral histories and storytelling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Look at the works of Wally Wilfred in the Art Gallery of NSW to experience his artistic approach to storytelling: <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/13.2021.a-d/>

**Identify perspectives, attitudes, and values of the past in sources**

When the dignitaries at the ceremony were making their speeches, they mentioned 'children of nature', 'savages' and 'natives', all of which were directly quoted from the speeches on the day Ayaiga was given his medal (page 37).

- What does this reveal about the perspectives and attitudes of the time?

Read the quotes in this newspaper article published following the ceremony: Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 19 December 1912, p.2. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article3269732>

