

Dabu the Baby Dugong by Selena Solomon, illustrated by Dennis Nona

Mamabala Books Aboriginal Corporation : Broome, W.A. 1992. 48 pp. \$19.95

Drawn from the rich culture of the peoples of the Torres Strait, this children's story-book contains a wealth of information. The story itself is written in a simple yet poetic manner which children can easily understand while the illustrations are striking in themselves, done in vibrant colours and bordered in a semi-traditional style.

The storyline is easy to follow, revolving around Dabu's relationship with his mother, and the shattering of their existence when she is killed by fishermen. Ending with Dabu's realisation that he belongs to a larger family of dugongs. In Solomon's words, he realises, 'He would always have a family and they would always be there'. Through this trauma and its resolution, Dabu grows up to adulthood.

Solomon's poetry is evocative of this type of dependency amongst individuals. At the outset, upon his birth, we are told Dabu is filled with fear, but that 'then there was the soothing sweet sound of his mother's voice. First the voice, then the warmth and security of his mother's body close to his'. This theme of belonging is very positive throughout the book.

Though the book contains passages which invoke images of violence, (ie, in relation to Dabu's mother's encounter with the fishermen) they would seem to be justified in terms of the context of the book. Set in a place where people still attempt to maintain their own indigenous culture, we see the act in the light of thousands of years of local tradition. Though not covered in this book, these passages would seem to provide a springboard from which parents and teachers could initiate discussion in relation to the dugong, focussing on the fishing culture of the Torres Strait as well as upon the endangerment of the species. Enough information is given to generate interest in the behaviour of these mammals about which so little is known. To quote one passage, for example:

The leader would always give a loud whistle to let others know where he was. This was a must, because dugongs always travel in great herds, not only that, dugongs have very poor eyesight; they rely mainly on hearing.

The text is not just written in English, but also in Kala-Lagaw-Ya, the traditional language of the western Torres Strait. Along with this co-text, there

is a comprehensive glossary of Kala-Lagaw-Ya to English translations with a few short linguistic notes on pronunciation. Included is a small piece entitled, 'Dabu comes from Badu', describing traditional life on the island of Badu (for which Dabu is an anagram), also customs relating to dugong hunting.

With its beautiful glossy presentation and easy to read text, *Dabu the Baby Dugong* is a pleasure to read for both adults and children. For those who would wish to generate an interest among children, particularly those at the primary school level, in the life and language of the people of the Torres Strait and the native animals of the region, this is the perfect book. It is obviously a labour of love for both author and illustrator. The Torres Strait is one of the most beautiful regions in Australia, although shamefully little is known about it.

Reviewer:

Brett O'Sullivan

Through Black Eyes : Handbook of Family Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

S.N.A.I.C.C.: Melbourne 1991. 60 pp.

Apart from the day to day duties in which the Secretariat of the National Aboriginal and Islander Care (SNAICC) is involved as a national body to local Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs), it also has a role to inform the Aboriginal community about health issues which are directly related to children. These are issues that in one way or another can effect the community as a whole.

It is imperative that issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, smoking etc. are taken out from under the covers and treated seriously. Without doubt, the continued silence on these issues has resulted in some very detrimental cases. On a national level, SNAICC has dealt with issues of child abuse, rape, domestic violence and the effects on children of passive smoking. Each issue was treated with the appropriate method of research in

order to determine the best way to deal with the problems. Sensitivity, understanding and struggle are contributed to produce something which all Aboriginal people can relate to culturally, and consequently more comfortably.

All too often feelings of unacceptance or discomfort are felt by Aboriginal people when all of the literature is based on white man's statistics on white people. As a result, attempts to