

Language teacher Roma 'Nan' Winmar at Moorditj Noongar Community College, Middle Swan. Picture: Megan Powell

In the quiet surrounds of Black Adder Creek in Perth's foothills, Noongar language is heard loud and proud. It is assembly day at Moorditj Noongar Community College, Middle Swan, and the kindy to Year 6 students begin with the school song — sung in Noongar and translated to English — followed by the National Anthem.

The ritual is a harmonious blend of the rich and ancient language and culture and the reality of modern times. Everyday Noongar words — spoken or sung — are heard at Moorditj because the language is taught in every class. If it's someone's birthday, students sing Happy Birthday in Noongar and, on special days such as Anzac Day, Noongar songs are played or performed.

The school's passion for language will soon be shared with the wider community as Year 5/6 students put the finishing touches on their own Noongar-English alphabet dictionary, illustrated with their own drawings, which they plan to publish as a picture book. "It's the preservation of a

priceless treasure, not just for indigenous peoples but for everyone," teacher Narelle Ryder said.

Noongar language teacher Roma "Nan" Winmar, an accomplished author and artist, guides the students, teachers and parents to use song and activities that embed key Noongar vocabulary and

"It is really complex, so learning through song is a marvellous way of doing things," Nan said.

Every day begins with a ride on the school bus because the college provides a service to transport students to and from school, from Midland and surrounding suburbs.

A rich and ancient LANGUAGE

Kaya noonakoort — hello everyone. Noongar is the ancient and official language of the Aboriginal people of South West WA. Lisa Quartermain looks at how young people are keeping Noongar language and culture alive.

SOUNDS AND ALPHABET

Noongar is made up of vowels and consonants.

Vowels

Sound Sounds like in English

| | |
|----|-------------------------------------|
| A | as in about or media |
| Aa | like ar as in car or part or father |
| E | as in ten |
| I | as in hit or bit |
| O | as in law or court |
| Oo | as in book or sometimes boot |

Consonants

Sound Sounds like in English

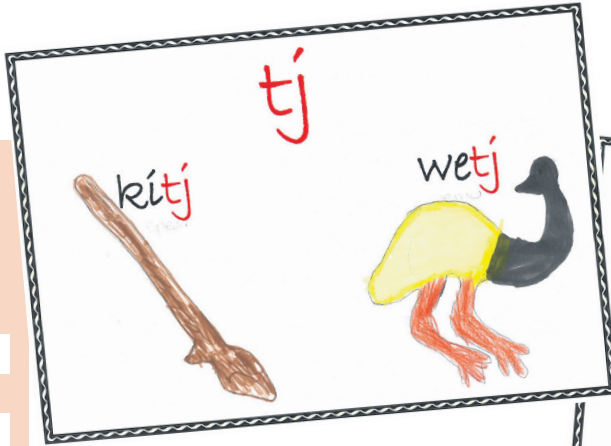
| | |
|-----|--|
| B | between English b and p, like the p in spin |
| D | between English d and t, like the t in string |
| Dj | as in judge |
| Dw | similar to twitch |
| K | between English g and k, like the k in skill |
| Kw | like quiet |
| -l | as in lamp or nil |
| -ly | like million, never quickly |
| M | as in man |
| N | as in nil |
| Ng | like ng in sing, never like ng in finger |
| Ny | like onion, nuisance, never like many |
| -p | between English b and p, like the p in spin |
| -r | as in ran or carol |
| -rd | like saying d with tip of tongue turned back, card |
| -rt | like saying t with tip of tongue turned back, cart |
| -rl | like saying l with tip of tongue turned back, whirl |
| -rn | like saying n with tip of tongue turned back, torn |
| -t | between English d and t, like the t in sting |
| -tj | like the ch in chair but sometimes like the j in jam |
| W | as in wet |
| Y | as in yell |

SOURCE: NOONGAR WAANGKINY: A LEARNER'S GUIDE TO NOONGAR BY LOIS SPEHN-JACKSON

SOURCES AND FURTHER LEARNING

Thanks to the following organisations for sharing their knowledge about Noongar language.

- noongarboodjar.com.au
- Batchelor Press: Noongar Waangkiny. A learner's Guide to Noongar
- noongarculture.org.au
- noongarculture.org.au/glossary/noongar-word-list/
- wirlomin.com.au
- Moorditj Noongar Community College
- landgate.wa.gov.au



Pages from Moorditj Noongar Community College's Noongar alphabet book.

HISTORY OF NOONGAR

Noongar was originally an oral language, meaning the first people of the South West communicated through speech, not the written word. Young people learnt about everything — history, law, tradition, geography, food and family — from elders who passed down knowledge verbally.

It wasn't until European settlement that written recordings of Noongar were made. Navigator Matthew Flinders made the first word list in the early 1800s and Robert Lyon, a white settler and early advocate for indigenous rights in the Swan River Colony, recorded information about the people from the warrior Yagan when the Whadjuk Noongar leader was incarcerated on Carnac Island, off Fremantle.

It is generally agreed there was no single, standard Noongar language and that the dialects of a closely related range of languages merged into Noongar.

During the mid-1980s and late 1990s, Noongar elders — including Moorditj teacher Roma Winmar — and their

families took part in a series of special meetings to discuss the endangered state of Noongar, and to document the language and develop a Noongar language course and dictionary.

The first Noongar Language and Culture Centre was established through the Bunbury Aboriginal Progress Association in 1986. Today, the Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation (NBLC) in Bunbury has a vast range of educational material and creates dictionaries, grammar guides and books.

Walyalup Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Fremantle runs regular activities, including language lessons, and Langford Aboriginal Association is another strong organisation that runs language classes and cultural activities.

"Nan" Winmar is also part of the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project, which produces illustrated books in Noongar language.



Teacher Narelle Ryder with students at Moorditj Noongar Community College, Middle Swan. Picture: Megan Powell

DID YOU KNOW?

There are different spellings of Noongar: Nyooongar. Njonga. Nyungar. Nyunga. Yunga. Nyungah.

THREE MAIN DIALECTS

While 14 language groups within Noongar country were identified during the late 1930s, there are now considered to be three main dialects:

- **Djiraly wongki** — northern dialect is spoken around Perth and on the coastal plain north to the Moore River, inland to New Norcia and east to the Wheatbelt.
- **Kongal-marawar wongki** — south-western dialect can be heard around Murray River east to Kojonup and south to Augusta.
- **Kongal-boyal wongki** — south-eastern dialect is used from Denmark and Albany in the far south, east to Esperance and Ravensthorpe and north through the Wheatbelt.

Check out some examples of Noongar dialect variations

| English | Northern | South-western | South-eastern |
|---------------|----------|---------------|---------------|
| Spear | Kidji | Kitj | Kitja |
| Woman | Yaku | Yaka | Yok |
| Tooth | Ngariku | Ngorlka | Ngorlak |
| Witchety grub | Bardi | Berda | Bert |

BOOKS BASED ON NOONGAR LANGUAGE

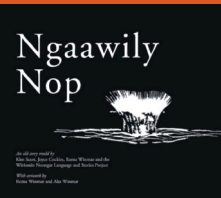
Noorn (Snake)

An old story retold by Kim Scott, Ryan Brown and the Wirlomin Noongar Language and Stories Project, with artwork by Alta Winmar, will soon be released by UWA Press. The bilingual picture book about a grandfather who secretly befriends a snake is written in Noongar with English translations and the stories are also available in audio.



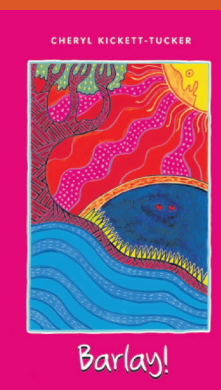
Ngwaaily Nop (Groper fish boy)

The same authors who wrote Noorn tell a story of country and family based on the ancient language. A boy goes looking for his uncle and finds himself as well in this bilingual book. Wirlomin has also released Mamang, Noongar Mambara Bakitj, Dwoort Baal Kaat, and Yira Boornak Nyininy in a similar style.



Barlay!

Perth academic and mother Cheryl Kickett-Tucker penned a bush tale about three kids who venture where they shouldn't. Barlay! is part of the Waarda series of indigenous children's books released by Fremantle Press.

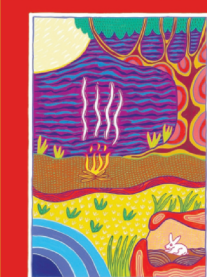


Lucky Thamu

Cheryl Kickett-Tucker and Jaylon Tucker's short is about a boy who goes camping and prospecting with his grandfather and learns a lot about the country.

Thanks to UWA Press, ED! has 10 copies of Noorn and Ngwaaily Nop to give away. For your chance to win, email your school's, teacher's, class' name and school's address* to ed@wanews.com.au, with NOONGAR BOOKS in the subject line, by Friday.

*See competition conditions on page 7.



Yallingup is a Noongar name. Picture: Instagram

PLACE NAMES WITH NOONGAR MEANINGS

Yallingup, Cowaramup, Balingup, Dwellingup . . . these well-known South West towns all end with the suffix "up", which in Noongar means "place of".

Some Noongar place names in Perth are Balga (meaning grass tree), Booragoon (lower reaches of Canning River), Nollamara (red and green kangaroo paw), Gidgegannup (place where spears are made), Koondoola (emu), Mirrabooka (Southern Cross constellation), Joondalup (place of whiteness or glistening), Karawara (green), Marangaroo (blue flowers) and Karrinyup (swamp).

Many names for rivers, mountains and parks are also indigenous language words. Noticing these words is the first step to generate a greater appreciation and respect for the significance of the language.

Watch Moorditj children speaking and singing Noongar in our video at thewest.com.au/news/education/preserving-the-noongar-language-bc-5597307808001.