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# Language teacher Roma 'Nan' Winmar **Community College,** Middle Swan.

A rich and ancient

Kaya noonakoort — hello everyone. Noongar LANGUAGE 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** 

n the quiet surrounds of Black Adder Creek in Perth's priceless foothills, Noongar language is treasure, not heard loud and proud. just for It is assembly day at indigenous Moorditi Noongar Community peoples but College, Middle Swan, and the

kindy to Year 6 students begin with teacher Narelle Ryder said. 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 Moorditi 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

for everyone,"

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 phrases in a fun environment.

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

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.

## FAST FACTS

• Almost 5000 WA students, from kindy to Year 12, studied 16 different Aboriginal languages in 38 public schools last year. Eight of the schools were in remote locations, 20 in country regions and 10 in the metropolitan

- Two high schools (Balga and Quairading) and 12 primary schools (Brookman, Cloverdale, Djidi Djidi, Medina, Southwell, Wilson Park, Yanchep, Avonvale, West Northam, Moorditj, Bentley and Roseworth) teach Noongar as a formal language course Noongar and other Aboriginal languages into their classes.
- Since 1998, the Department of Education has run a training course to enable people who speak Aboriginal languages to be Aboriginal language teachers in schools. A record 26 new trainees started in 2017, of which 11 are training to become Noongar language teachers.

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

## Noongar is made up of vowels and consonants.

Aboriginal artwork is prominent

around the school, which opened in

2001 and has 80 students, and the

design of the buildings reflects

symbolic aspects of Aboriginal

boya

NORLD'S FIRST

**English and English to Noongar** 

IOONGAR DICTIONARY

worker Rose Whitehurst compiled a 50-page

**Noongar Dictionary** subtitled **Noongar to** 

produced a dictionary and made it available

TAFE centres, local associations and homes.

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to the whole population through schools,

Here are some of the 2200 words and

meanings featured in the dictionary.

• balyat = little person, cheeky and

mischievous, with magical powers

• djabooly-djabooly = swimming

• balyoongar = sand, soil

• djen bwoka = shoe

• djildjit = fish

• maam = father

djerap-djerap = happy

• kaa-kaa = kookaburra

• djoo-djoo = shame shame

• bardang = run away, flee!

About 20 years ago, Noongar language

## **Sound** Sounds like in English

as in about or media like ar as in car or part or father

as in ten as in hit or bit

as in law or court

as in book or sometimes boot

### **Consonants**

**Sound** *Sounds like in English* 

between English b and p, like the p in

between English d and t, like the t in

as in judge similar to twitch

between English g and k, like the k in

like quiet as in lamp or nil

like million, never quickly

like ng in sing, never like ng in finger like onion, nuisance, never like many

between English b and p, like the p in

as in ran or carol

like saying d with tip of tongue turned

like saying t with tip of tongue turned

back, cart like saying I with tip of tongue turned

back, whirl

like saying n with tip of tongue turned between English d and t, like the t in

like the ch in chair but sometimes like the j in jam

as in wet

as in yell

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

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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.

HISTORY OF NOONGAR

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.

**Pages from Moorditj Noongar** 

alphabet book.

djídí-djídí

**Community College's Noongar** 

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.

Moongar

KNOW?

There are different

spellings of Noongar:

Nyoongar, Njonga, Nyungar, Nyunga,

Yunga, Nyungah.

NOOM

WISE WORDS FROM

**AUTHOR KIM SCOTT** 

becomes a key part of what it means to

(jarrah) and animals (quokka)," Kim said.

"All of us living in south-western Australia

speak a language strongly influenced by Noongar language - for

example, place names (Yallingup) along with many names for plants

history and for the Noongar community to be empowered through

only some hundreds of people speaking it in the home. But the same

data also shows that Noongar language is regaining strength."

PLACE NAMES WITH NOONGAR

Yallingup, Cowaramup, Balingup, Dwellingup . . . these

which in Noongar means "place of".

well-known South West towns all end with the suffix "up",

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),

glistening), Karawara (green), Marangaroo (blue flowers)

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

Koondoola (emu), Mirrabooka (Southern Cross

constellation), Joondalup (place of whiteness or

"I'd like it to be especially strong in the Noongar community — for its

"Classical Noongar language is endangered and census data indicates

renaissance and health to be a major part of the narrative of our shared

Noongar novelist Kim Scott has a

dream — that Noongar language

be West Australian.

sharing it," he said.

YALLINGUP REEF

PROTECTED AREA

ISHERIES DEPT

MEANINGS

The second secon

and Karrinyup (swamp).

significance of the language.

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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

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

• 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

Northern South-western South-eastern **English** Spear Kidji Woman Yaku Yaka Yok Tooth Ngarlku Ngorlka Ngorlak Witchety grub Bardi Berda Bert

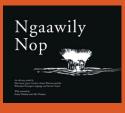
## BOOKS BASED ON NOONGAR LANGUAGE

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.

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, Noongai Mambara Bakitj, Dwoort Baal Kaat, and Yira Boornak Nyininy in a similar style.

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.



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

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.

## **SOURCES AND FURTHER LEARNING**

Thanks to the following organisations for sharing their knowledge

• noongarboodjar.com.au

• wirlomin.com.au

about Noongar language.

noongarculture.org.au/glossary/noongar-word-list/

Moorditj Noongar Community College

Batchelor Press: Noongar Waangkiny, A learner's Guide to Noongar

noongarculture.org.au

landgate.wa.gov.au

## **Teacher Narelle** Ryder with students at Moorditi

Noongar

Community

College, Middle

**Swan.** Picture:

Megan Powell