



About the Author



Doris Pilkington (1937–2014) was an Aboriginal author best known for her nonfiction narrative *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, based on her mother's 1931 escape from the Moore River Mission. Under the Aborigines Act (1906–1954), approximately 100,000 children were removed from their tribal lands and placed in the care of the state. In 1940, when she was three-and-a-half years old, Doris became one of these children.

from Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence

Concept Vocabulary

As you conduct your first read of the excerpt from *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*, you will encounter these words.

urgently

nervously

confidently

cautiously

Using a Dictionary and Thesaurus If a word is unfamiliar to you and you cannot understand the meaning from the context, look up the word in a dictionary or thesaurus. Most **dictionaries**, whether print or online, will provide the meaning of the word, its part of speech, its pronunciation, and its etymology. A **thesaurus**, on the other hand, will not provide definitions but will include synonyms of the word, or words with similar meanings. For instance, compare these two entries for the word *crimson*.

Dictionary

crim•son (KRIHM zuhn) *adj.*
red in color

Thesaurus

crimson *adj.* dark red, bloody, cherry, scarlet, rosy, cardinal, ruby

Apply your knowledge of using a dictionary and thesaurus as well as other vocabulary strategies to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words you encounter during your first read.

First Read NONFICTION

Apply these strategies as you conduct your first read. You will have an opportunity to complete a close read after your first read.

STANDARDS

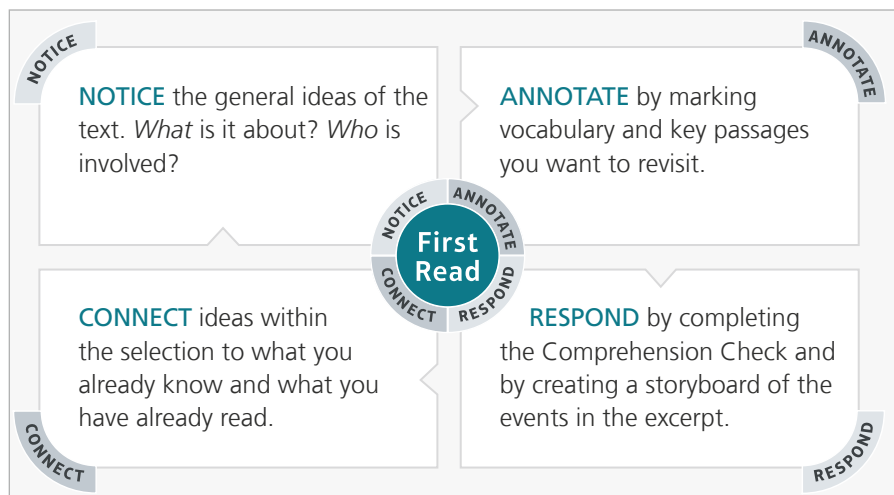
Reading Informational Text

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Language

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on *grade 8 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

- c. Consult general and specialized reference materials, both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.



from Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence

Doris Pilkington

BACKGROUND

Aboriginal Australians are the native people of the Australian continent. From 1910 to 1970, many children of mixed Aboriginal and white descent were taken from their families by the government in an effort to train them to fit into white Australian culture. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is a nonfiction narrative account of three Mardu Aboriginal girls who escaped a government settlement in 1931 to return home. The Mardu are the indigenous, or native, people of the Australian desert.

SCAN FOR
MULTIMEDIA



- 1 **T**he other girls were now getting ready for school, and the three watched quietly amidst all the activity. Bossing and bullying was everywhere around them and there were cries and squeals of, "Don't, you're hurting my head," as the tangled knots were combed out with tiny, fragile combs.
- 2 "Oh, Mummy, Daddy, Mummy, Daddy, my head," yelled a young girl, who stamped her feet and tried to pull away from her torturer, an older, well-built girl who seemed to have adopted the girl as her baby sister. They performed this ritual together every morning before school.
- 3 "Come on, you girls," ordered Martha Jones as she passed by their bed. "The school bell's gone. Don't be late on your first day."
- 4 "Alright, we're coming as soon as we empty the toilet bucket," answered Molly softly.
- 5 "I'll wait for you then," said Martha.
- 6 "No, don't wait we'll follow you, we know where the school is."
- 7 "Alright then, we'll go along. Come on, Rosie," she said as she rushed out of the door into the cold, drizzly morning.
- 8 As soon as the other girls left the dormitory, Molly beckoned her two sisters to come closer to her, then she whispered **urgently**, "We're not going to school, so grab your bags. We're not staying here." Daisy and Gracie were stunned and stood staring at her.
- 9 "What did you say?" asked Gracie.
- 10 "I said, we're not staying here at the settlement, because we're going home to Jigalong."¹

NOTES

Use a dictionary or a thesaurus or indicate another strategy you used to help you determine meaning.

urgently (UR juhnt lee) *adv.*

MEANING:

1. **Jigalong** *n.* region in Western Australia where the Mardu Aboriginal people live.

NOTES

Use a dictionary or a thesaurus or indicate another strategy you used to help you determine meaning.

nervously (NUR vuhs lee) *adv.*

MEANING:

confidently (KON fuh dehnt lee) *adv.*

MEANING:

- 11 Gracie and Daisy weren't sure whether they were hearing correctly or not.
- 12 "Move quickly," Molly ordered her sisters. She wanted to be miles away before their absence was discovered. Time was of the essence.
- 13 Her two young sisters faced each other, both looking very scared and confused. Daisy turned to Molly and said **nervously**, "We're frightened, Dgudu.² How are we going to find our way back home to Jigalong? It's a long way from home."
- 14 Molly leaned against the wall and said **confidently**, "I know it's a long way to go but it's easy. We'll find the rabbit-proof fence³ and follow that all the way home."
- 15 "We gunna walk all the way?" asked Daisy.
- 16 "Yeah," replied Molly, getting really impatient now. "So don't waste time."
- 17 The task of finding the rabbit-proof fence seemed like a simple solution for a teenager whose father was an inspector who traveled up and down the fences, and whose grandfather had worked with him. Thomas Craig told her often enough that the fence stretched from coast to coast, south to north across the country. It was just a matter of locating a stretch of it then following it to Jigalong. The two youngsters trusted their big sister because she was not only the eldest but she had always been the bossy one who made all the decisions at home. So they did the normal thing and said, "Alright, Dgudu, we'll run away with you."
- 18 They snatched up their meager possessions and put them into calico bags and pulled the long drawstrings and slung them around their necks. Each one put on two dresses, two pairs of calico bloomers, and a coat.
- 19 Gracie and Daisy were about to leave when Molly told them to, "Wait. Take those coats off. Leave them here."
- 20 "Why?" asked Gracie.
- 21 "Because they're too heavy to carry."
- 22 The three sisters checked to make sure they hadn't missed anything then, when they were absolutely satisfied, Molly grabbed the galvanized bucket and ordered Gracie to get hold of the other side and walk quickly trying not to spill the contents as they made their way to the lavatories. Daisy waited under the large pine tree near the stables. She reached up and broke a small twig that was hanging down low and was examining it closely when the other two joined her.

2. **Dgudu** older sister in Mardudjara, the Mardu Aborigines' native language.

3. **the rabbit-proof fence** fence that ran from the north coast of Australia to the south coast to deter pests such as rabbits.

- 23 “Look, Dgudu, like grass indi?⁴” asked Daisy, passing the twig to Molly to feel.
- 24 “Youay,”⁵ she said, as she gave it to Gracie who crushed the green pine needles into her small hands and sniffed them. She liked the smell and was about to give her opinion when Molly reminded them that they didn’t have time to stand around examining pine needles.
- 25 “Come on, run, you two,” she said sharply as she started to run towards the river.
- 26 Many young people had stood under the same big pine tree and waited while someone went into the stable or the garage to distract Maitland, the caretaker and stableman. Then they would give the signal that the coast was clear and everyone would dash into the grainary and fill their empty fruit tins with wheat from one of the opened bags at the back of the shed. Some of it was roasted on flat tins over the hot coals, the rest was saved to fill initials that had been dug into the sloping embankment of firm yellow sand along the cliffs. These were left until the first rain came, then all the inmates would rush down to inspect the cliffs. This grass graffiti revealed the new summer romances between the older boys and girls. But these three girls from the East Pilbara had no intention of participating, they had a more important task ahead of them.
- 27 On they went, dashing down the sandy slope of the cliffs, dodging the small shrubs on the way and following the narrow path to the flooded river. They slowed down only when they reached the bottom. Molly paused briefly, glancing at the pumping shed on their right where they had been the day before. Turning towards it she said to Gracie and Daisy, “This way.” She ran for about 25 meters, crashing into the thick paperbark trees and the branches of the river gums that blocked their path.
- 28 Molly strode on as best as she could along the muddy banks, pausing only to urge her young sisters to hurry up and try to keep up with her. She kept up that pace until she saw what she thought to be a likely spot to cross the swift flowing river.
- 29 The three girls watched the swirling currents and the white and brown frothy foam that clung to the trunks of the young river gums and clumps of tea-trees. They didn’t know that this became one of the most popular spots during the hot summer days. This was the local swimming pool that would be filled with naked or semi-naked brown bodies, laughing, splashing, swimming and diving into the cool brown water during the long summer afternoons. Every now and then, the swimmers would sit on the coarse river sand and yank ugly, brown, slimy leeches off

4. **indi?** “isn’t it?” (Mardudjara).

5. **Youay** “Yes” (Mardudjara).

their bodies and impale them on sticks and turn them inside out and plunge them into the hot burning mud. The next day the swimmers would pull the sticks out of the sand and gloat at the shriveled dry skins that once were horrible little creatures, ready to suck all the blood from their bodies—or so the young people were led to believe.

- 30 “The river is too deep and fast here, let’s try up further,” Molly said, leading the way through the thick young suckers and washed-up logs. They continued along the bank making slow progress through the obstacles that nature had left in their path. At last they came to a section in the river that seemed narrow enough to cross.
- 31 “We’ll try here,” said Molly as she bent down to pick up a long stick. She slid down the bank into the river and began measuring its depth just as she had seen Edna Green do the previous afternoon, while Daisy and Gracie watched patiently on the bank.
- 32 “Nah, too deep,” Molly said in disgust. “Not here.”
- 33 “Gulu,⁶ Dgudu,” cried the youngsters as they ran to follow her through the wet foliage.
- 34 The three girls walked along the muddy banks for another 25 meters when they came to a clearing, devoid of any shrubs or young suckers, where the floods had receded.
- 35 In a couple of weeks’ time, this place would become a muddy skating rink where the girls of the settlement would spend hours having fun skating up and down the slippery mud. The idea was to skate by placing one foot in front of the other and maintain your balance for a couple of meters at least. The boys had their own skating area further up in a more secluded place amongst the thick tea-tree shrub. Peeping toms never existed in those days. Each group respected each other’s privacy. Nearby, a huge fire would be lit and kept stoked. When everyone had finished skating in the slippery mud they would dive into the icy cold river to wash off the mud, then dry themselves by the roaring fire, dress, and return to the compound.
- 36 Molly decided to follow the paths made by the cattle. Another attempt was made to cross the river but once again proved unsuccessful. She walked on angrily, pushing the thick growth of eucalyptus suckers roughly aside, at the same time urging Daisy and Gracie to walk faster. But they decided that it was much safer at a distance and they followed her muddy footprints in silence without any questions, trusting her leadership totally.
- 37 They were still fighting their way through the tea-trees for almost an hour when they heard Molly call out to them somewhere down the track. “Yardini! Bukala! Bukala!”⁷

6. **Gulu** “wait” (Mardudjara).

7. **Yardini! Bukala! Bukala!** “Come here! Hurry! Hurry!” (Mardudjara).

- 38 Daisy and Gracie ran as fast as they could along the muddy path until they reached her. Molly was standing near a large river gum. As they stood gasping for wind she said, “We gunna cross here.”
- 39 As three pairs of eager eyes examined it closely, they knew that they had found the perfect place to cross the flooded river. A tree leaned over the water creating a natural bridge for them to cross safely to the other side.
- 40 The girls scraped mud from their feet then climbed onto the trunk and walked **cautiously** to the end then swung down off the limb onto the slippery, muddy bank on the other side. They sloshed through the wet, chocolate-colored banks for at least another two hours, then decided to rest amongst the thick reeds behind the tall river gums.
- 41 A few minutes later, Molly stood up and told her young sisters to get up. “We go kyalie⁸ now all the way.” They obeyed without any protests. Ducking under the hanging branches of the paperbark trees they hurried as best they could, stomping on the reeds and bull rushes that covered the banks of the fast flowing river. The only sounds that could be heard were the startled birds fluttering above as they left their nests in fright, and the *slish, slosh* of the girls’ feet as they trampled over the bull rushes. 🐼

8. **kyalie** “north” (Mardudjara).

NOTES

Use a dictionary or a thesaurus or indicate another strategy you used to help you determine meaning.

cautiously (KAW shuhs lee)
adv.

MEANING:

Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read. Review and clarify details with your group.

1. At the beginning of the excerpt, where are the three sisters living?
2. Where does Molly want to go?
3. How does Molly know about the rabbit-proof fence?
4. What does Molly try to avoid when looking for a place to cross the river?
5. 📓 **Notebook** Confirm your understanding of the excerpt by creating a storyboard of events.

RESEARCH

Research to Clarify Choose at least one unfamiliar detail in the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the narrative?