

Teacher's notes: **About the artist**

# Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi

**1967–present**

Born at Papunya in 1967, Gabriella Possum is the older daughter in a family of artists. She is one of the Anmatyerr, an indigenous Australian people, or language group, from the Northern Territory. Her father, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, was a renowned painter and she and her younger sister started by helping him to 'fill in the dots' on some of his canvases. In her early twenties she became well known in her own right for her decorative style.



## Family life

Gabriella married Selwyn Burns, who plays lead guitar in the rock group *Coloured Stone*, and has five children. They live on the outskirts of Melbourne.

## Artistic achievement

She was awarded a grant from the Aboriginal Arts Unit of the Australia Council for the Arts and won the Alice Springs Art Prize when she was quite young. She uses strong, bold colours inspired by the desert, and many different techniques, including the 'dot' technique. She uses modern materials – acrylics on canvas. She has had various exhibitions around the world and worked on commissions for posters, clothing designs and merchandise.



## Stories in art

Her paintings often depict stories handed down from her ancestors. *Seven Sisters Dreaming* traces the movement of the Pleiades and the Morning Star as they journey among the constellations of the Milky Way. In Gabriella's painting, the Sisters travel over a vast expanse of country, followed by a man called Wati-Nyir. He appears in different forms, disguised to deceive them. She recreates the desert night sky with the deep blue of space. The Milky Way is depicted as softly glowing stars.

Gabriella's *Bush Tucker* paintings feature women collecting and preparing bush food including coconut, plum and berries.

## Where can you see Gabriella's work?

In 2008 Gabriella was commissioned to create a 20-metre art installation depicting her custodial Grandmother's Country for Jamie Durie's display at the 2008 RHS Chelsea Flower Show in London. Durie presented the Queen with an original work by the artist, which now hangs in the royal collection. Her works are held the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Flinders University Art Museum, and the Kelton Foundation in Los Angeles, USA.

Teacher's notes: **Bush Fire Dreaming**

# Bush Fire Dreaming

The poster features a painting called *Bush Fire Dreaming* by artist Gabriella Possum Nungurrayi. With younger children, it is a good idea to talk about the history of Australia before looking at the poster, so that they have an idea of where Australia is and some idea about the first settlers. For older or more able children you could show them the image and ask them where they think it is from and what they think it is.



## Talking about the painting

Talk to the children about the image. Do they like it? What do they like/dislike? What can they see in the painting? How large or small do they think it is in real life? (It is 63 x 90 cm.) What makes them think this? Can they see shapes, colours, recurring patterns or symbols? What do they think the dots represent?

Explain to the children that the dots and symbols mean different things. Look at the photocopyable page 'Aboriginal art', which shows a selection of symbols that the indigenous people of Australia use to depict places. Invite the children to use this to help them create their own images. They could design and include some of their own symbols too.

## Create your own dotty paintings

Tell the children that they are going to create their own Aboriginal-style paintings, perhaps based on a section of the platypus story. Give each child a small (A5) piece of paper – dot painting is quite intricate and time consuming so they will be unable to fill a large space. Alternatively, give the children large (A3 or A2) pieces of paper and ask them to work in groups. This will give them a feel for working to the scale of the artist. Ideally, take the class to the hall and ask them to work sitting cross legged on the floor, as Gabriella does, with music in the background to inspire them.

Children should first sketch out their ideas in pencil. Once they have designed the layout of their paintings, filling as much of the paper as they can, they should paint in the background using earthy colours. Let this dry completely before starting on the next stage. To create the dots, children will need a range of objects with round ends in a few different sizes, for example wooden dowels, toothpicks, cotton buds. Tell children to keep their painting stick upright and to reload the stick with paint after a few dots. Acrylic paint will work best for this activity. Give the children time to practise the technique before creating their final version.

For more ideas and inspiration visit [www.australianativeart.com](http://www.australianativeart.com).

