

Desert Jungle

Jeannie Baker

Learning Resource for Early Childhood and Primary



Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #1* (detail), 2023, collage: preserved vegetation, earth, cactus spines, paint, artists clay, feathers, preserved coralline seaweed, fabric. Photo by Jaime Plaza.



We are Ngurra....we are Country.

As ongoing custodians, our 'everyday' revolves around a profound and deep spiritual connection to Country.

We care and conserve Ngurra as She nurtures and nourishes us.

When we put our feet in the dirt, we follow in the footsteps of Our Ancestors, revitalising our connection and strengthening our oneness with Mother Earth.

Walk gently with good intent on our Mother.

- Leanne Tobin

Leanne Tobin is a multidisciplinary artist of Irish, English and Aboriginal heritage, descending from the Buruburong and Wumali clans of the Dharug, the traditional Aboriginal people of the Greater Sydney region.

Our preconception of
desert as a barren,
desolate, lifeless place
needs to be challenged.

- Jeannie Baker



Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #20* (detail), 2023, collage: paint, artists clay, preserved vegetation, cactus spines, feathers, wire, fabric, hair, sisal. Photo by Jaime Plaza.



Who is Jeannie Baker?

Jeannie Baker is an artist, author, and filmmaker. Jeannie creates miniature collage constructions that are artworks in themselves but are designed as illustrations for children's picture books. The collages are created from a combination of natural and artificial materials and often include textures from the actual materials portrayed in the book. Jeannie is inspired by the natural world and many of her books are focused on environmental conservation.

She works from her studio in her home in Sydney.

Where is the Sonoran Desert?

“My story takes place in the Valle de los Cirios in the Sonoran Desert, which covers a third of Baja California. It is the largest natural protected area of land in Mexico.

The Sonoran Desert is the hottest desert in Mexico and some years there is no rain at all. The little rain that falls occurs over two rainy seasons summer and winter. The unusual weather patterns are just one of the reasons why this area is home to great biodiversity, with more plant species than any other desert.” – Jeannie Baker





Photo from Jeannie's trip to the Sonoran Desert. Courtesy of the artist

“This subtropical desert is named after the cirio, an extraordinary tree that thrives here and gives the valley much of its character. The forms cirios take are often wild and strange: some are thick, some thin; some soar and branch crazily; some droop and curl fantastically; no two are alike.”- Jeannie Baker



Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #8* (detail), 2023, collage: paint, artists clay, preserved vegetation, fabric, hair, foam rubber. Photo by Jaime Plaza.

“For six weeks in winter 2017, I immersed myself in the landscape of this place, spoke with locals, met with scientists, and started developing ideas for *Desert Jungle*. I’ve depicted the desert as it looked then. It was late winter, there had been rain ... and it was glorious.”- Jeannie Baker



Photo from Jeannie's trip to the Sonoran Desert. Courtesy of the artist

Q&A with Jeannie Baker

What is a collage?

A collage is something that's made from a number of different pieces, which are then stuck together. You could make a collage just from pieces of paper joined together, but in my collages, I use a large variety of materials.

Why do I work in collage?

I don't know any other way of achieving the results that collage can give me. I've always loved textures and started as a painter trying to reproduce textures using paint. Then I thought, why not use the actual textures and that is what I do now.

What do I use to make my collages?

Whenever I can I use the real material ... because for me that gives the result I am wanting. For example, if I want to show an area of sand in my picture I'll use real sand, my birds will have real feathers stuck on them. For tree trunks I will often use paperbark tree bark or thin slices of other types of tree bark from a dead tree trunk.

How long does it take me to make a book?

I could work much more quickly if my pictures were drawings or paintings! A book like *Where the forest meets the sea* will take two or three years, but *One Hungry Spider* only took me three months.

If you use real vegetation on your collages, how do you stop the vegetation from dying?

I bathe the vegetation in a mixture of special chemicals for about a week. These chemicals preserve the vegetation and remove all the juices in the vegetation, which would in time destroy it. Then I finely spray the vegetation with paint to give it a permanent colour, before sticking it onto my collages.

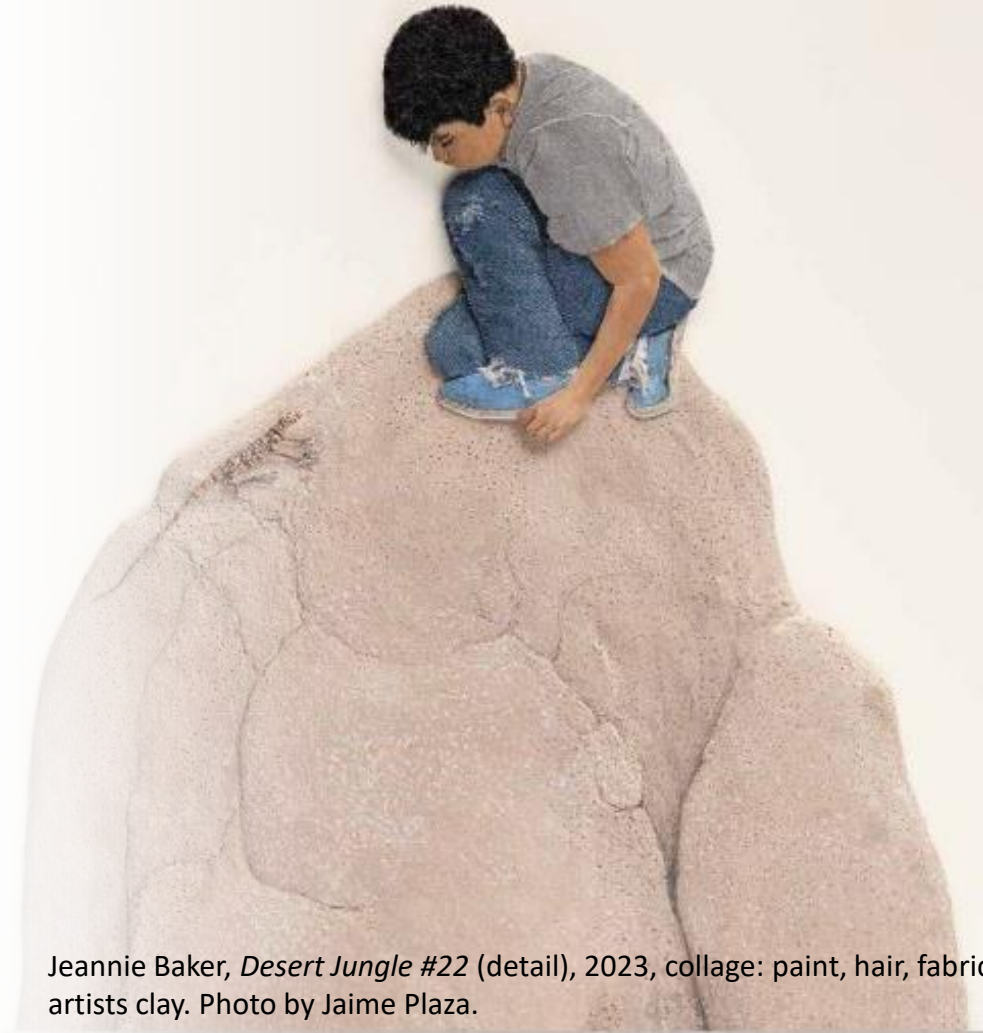
Storytelling

Desert Jungle follows the journey of a young boy as he grows from fearing the unfamiliar desert landscape to realising it as a place of endless wonder.

- How does Jeannie Baker communicate this journey through her images?

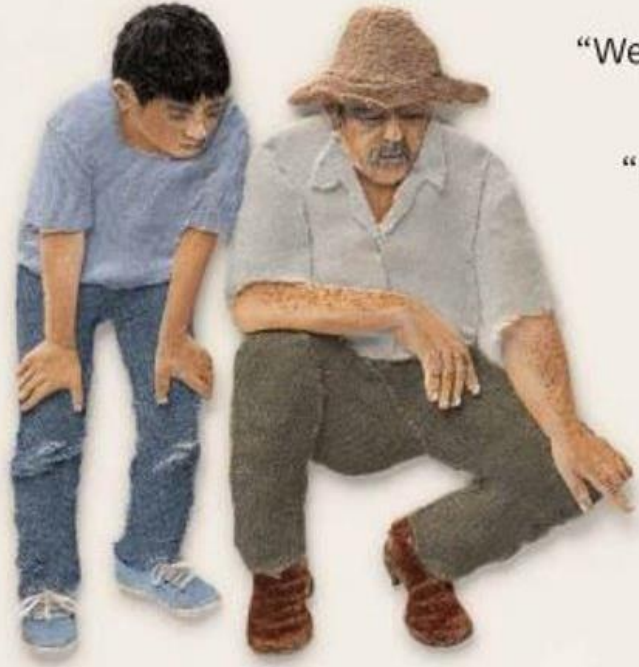
Activity

- Draw a place in nature that you have been. Describe how this place made you feel.



Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #22* (detail), 2023, collage: paint, hair, fabric, artists clay. Photo by Jaime Plaza.

Suddenly, Grandpa stops and points.



“We won’t go closer,”
he whispers.
“Isn’t it beautiful!”

Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #11* (detail), 2023, collage: paint, fabric, hair, leather, artists clay. Photo by Jaime Plaza.

Human relationship with nature

Compare how different peoples, generations, cultures and individuals connect with their natural environment.

Activity

- Speak to a grandparent or grandfriend about their experiences with nature. Did they spend a lot of time playing outdoors when they grew up? Did they learn about protecting our environment in school?
- Find out about the relationship that Indigenous peoples from your area have with country. How have they practiced custodianship? Are there any plants or animals important to the area?

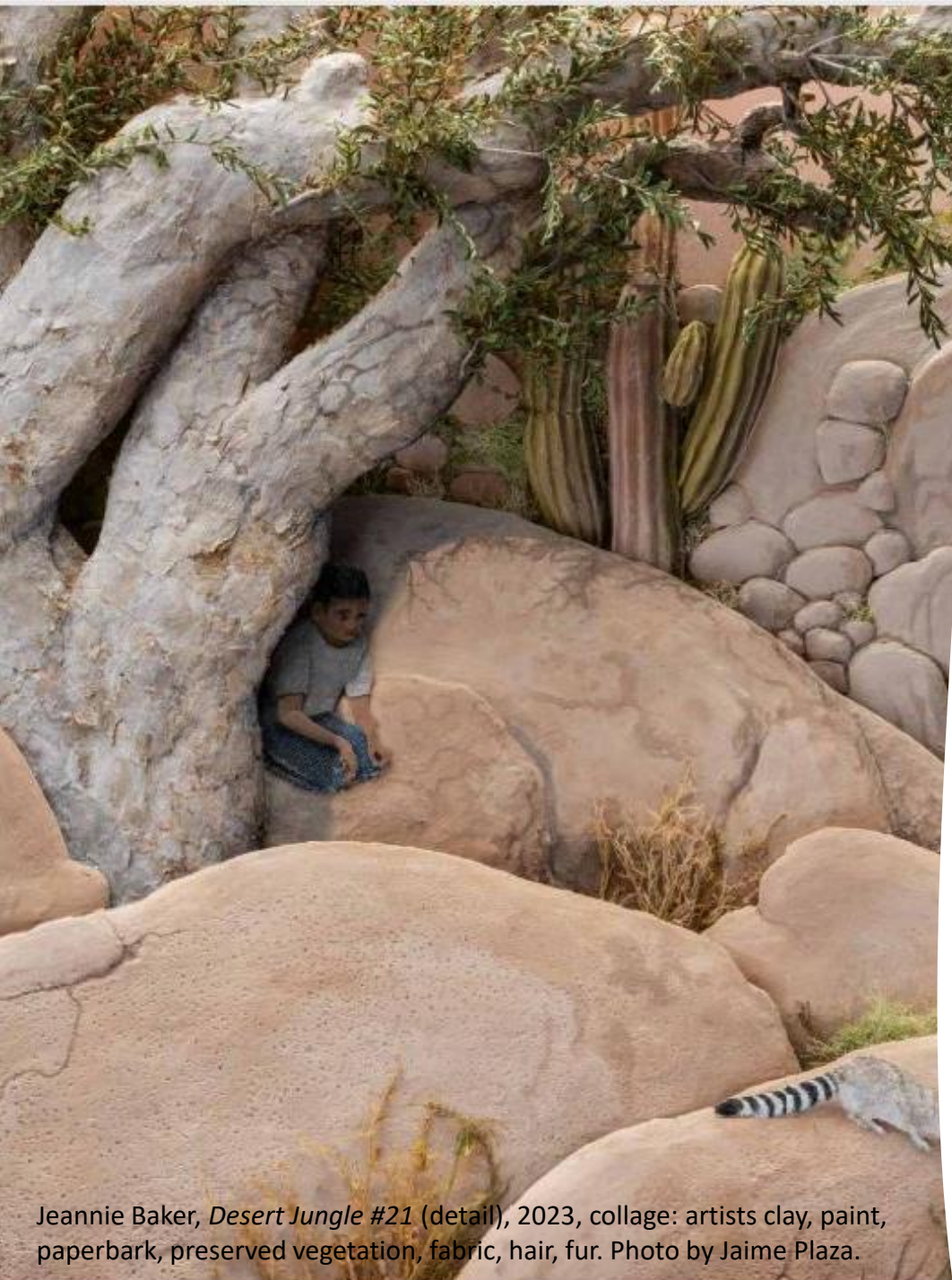
Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the variety of animals, plants, fungi, and microorganisms in our natural world. Deserts play an important role in biodiversity as their unique climates make them home to species of plants and animals not found anywhere else.

Activity

- Compare the environment of the Sonoran Desert with an Australian desert environment. What plants and animals can be found in each location? How are they similar or different?
- Create a list of the different plants and animals found at your school or in your local area. Draw illustrations of the species you find or photograph them.





Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #21* (detail), 2023, collage: artists clay, paint, paperbark, preserved vegetation, fabric, hair, fur. Photo by Jaime Plaza.

Environmental protection

The Valley of the Cirios is threatened by land sales, sub-divisions, mining, tourism and industrial development. The area is currently under consideration to be named a world heritage site.

- What would change if the Valley was awarded world heritage status? Why might this be important?

Activity

- Find out about one of the World Heritage sites in Australia. Why was the site you have chosen awarded world heritage status?
- Plan an action you will take at school or at home that will help protect the natural environment. You could start a compost or worm farm, pick up rubbish from the playground, get rid of single use plastic in your lunch box, grow a native plant, or think of your own idea.

Materials and techniques

Jeannie Baker uses a combination of natural and artificial materials in her collages. The collages for her most recent book, *Desert Jungle*, include real cactus spines, earth and plants that she has preserved.

Activity

- Create a textures book about your school playground or local area. Collect materials such as sticks, leaves, grass or sand from this place and stick them in a book or folder. See how many different materials you can find!



Jeannie Baker, framed collage textures.

Curriculum links

Early Years Learning Framework:

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world

- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

Outcome 4: children are confident and involved learners

- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity

Outcome 5: children are effective communicators

- Children interact with a range of texts and interact with these texts
- Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media

Australian Curriculum: Foundation – Year 2

Visual Arts

- [ACAVAM106](#) Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists
- [ACAVAM107](#) Use and experiment with different materials, techniques, technologies and processes to make artworks
- [ACAVAM108](#) Create and display artworks to communicate ideas to an audience
- [ACAVAR109](#) Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks, starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Humanities and Social Sciences

- [ACHASSI009/ ACHASSI026](#) Reflect on learning to propose how to care for places and sites that are important or significant
- [ACHASSI025](#) Draw simple conclusions based on discussions, observations and information displayed in pictures and texts and on maps
- [ACHASSK045](#) The importance today of a historical site of cultural or spiritual significance in the local area, and why it should be preserved
- [ACHASSK047](#) The way the world is represented in geographic divisions and the location of Australia in relation to these divisions

Australian Curriculum: Years 3 and 4

Visual Arts

- [ACAVAM110](#) Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times, including artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations
- [ACAVAM111](#) Use materials, techniques and processes to explore visual conventions when making artworks
- [ACAVAM112](#) Present artworks and describe how they have used visual conventions to represent their ideas
- [ACAVAR113](#) Identify intended purposes and meanings of artworks using visual arts terminology to compare artworks, starting with visual artworks in Australia including visual artworks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Humanities and Social Sciences

- [ACHASSK068](#) The main climate types of the world and the similarities and differences between the climates of different places
- [ACHASSK069](#) The similarities and differences between places in terms of their type of settlement, demographic characteristics and the lives of the people who live there, and people's perceptions of these places
- [ACHASSK088](#) The importance of environments, including natural vegetation, to animals and people
- [ACHASSK089](#) The custodial responsibility Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have for Country/Place, and how this influences views about sustainability

Australian Curriculum: Years 5 and 6

Visual Arts

- [ACAVAM114](#) Explore ideas and practices used by artists, including practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent different views, beliefs and opinions
- [ACAVAM115](#) Develop and apply techniques and processes when making their artworks
- [ACAVAM116](#) Plan the display of artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience
- [ACAVAR117](#) Explain how visual arts conventions communicate meaning by comparing artworks from different social, cultural and historical contexts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artworks

Humanities and Social Sciences

- [ACHASSK113](#) The environmental and human influences on the location and characteristics of a place and the management of spaces within them



Jeannie Baker, *Desert Jungle #18* (detail), 2023, collage: preserved plant material, cactus thorns, paint, fabric, artists clay, LED light. Photo by Jaime Plaza.

PP&VA

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