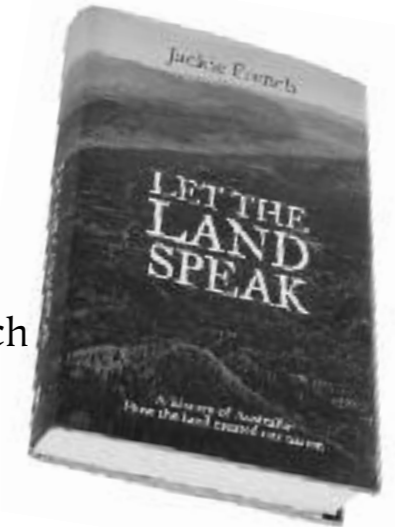


## BOOK REVIEW

## Let the Land Speak

by Jackie French

Review by  
Maggie Hickey

LOOKING FOR SOMETHING interesting, entertaining and informative to read over the Festive Season? How about a book on the history of Australia but from a very different perspective to those by Geoffrey Blainey — or even Robert Hughes.

This history encompasses in staggering breadth, a story rarely told. It is about the continent itself, its own history and how it has shaped ours.

Jackie French is well known as a broadcaster, and a writer of over one hundred and forty books for adults and children. She is also a neighbour, living and working in the Araluen Valley, her home for many years. Her interests and knowledge are wide and reflected in her writings about history, cookery, gardening, self sufficiency and the environment.

Her latest offering, *Let the Land Speak – A history of Australia: How the land created our nation*, is in many ways a distillation of all that knowledge and wisdom. This is no dry dispassionate account, but a lively journey through the land, its history, its people and even its recipes!

Every page is crammed with information that casts new light on conventional narratives. Did you know, for instance, that Captain Cook may never have made it to our shores, had it not been for goat's poo?

A great deal of research has gone into the writing of this fascinating account but I suspect that much of the information was already at French's fingertips. In Chapter 11, 'The history of a nation in a pumpkin scone,' she tells us how to catch a yabby using old pantyhose. She even instructs us on how to cook one in a rock pool and you can bet your life this isn't mere theory — she'll have done it!

She lives her beliefs in the Araluen Valley, which as she says, has given her the heart of her life and work. A much loved and much acclaimed writer, she is the recipient of over 60 awards here and internationally and next year becomes the Australian Children's Poet Laureate for 2014/15.

*Let the Land Speak* is an impressive work from an impressive writer. French describes herself as a storyteller and this is borne out in her latest work. Do not be fooled into thinking its message is not a serious one however.

In the final chapter, she provides some predictions about the next one hundred years. Some are dire, all provide food for thought.

As she observes at the outset. "We need to listen to our land. If we fail, we will stumble into a future we can neither predict nor understand."



CAMERON PONT, MYA NIPPERESS, JAY DAVIES AND INGA NEILSEN

## Dialectical disputation

Julian Davies speaks in the affirmative

BRAIDWOOD CENTRAL SCHOOL has a bit of a tradition of debating started by Jonathan Millar when he was here. About five years ago Jonathan asked me to start looking at debating in primary.

When I was young debating was very combative, adversarial, with lots of show ponies trying to do the other team down. It's very different now.

It's much more collegiate and friendly — although not everyone is like that — but it's much more about the content than the manner and the show-offishness of the debating.

It's about ideas and that's what attracted me to help at school. Right from year 4 through to year 10 at BCS the skills of debating are encouraged. The notion I bring to it is to help kids to understand the complexity of issues. Because you can have an opinion but when you start seeing that there's another side to an argument it helps you to understand the complexity of public issues — and how difficult they can be to resolve.

I hope also that debating develops critical thinking that helps with other areas like essay writing by helping students to think and organize their thoughts. Of course they have quite a lot of fun along the way too.

Some kids can be uncomfortable arguing a position they don't believe in but I say to them, "We're not asking you change your views, but rather to examine other people's points of view".

The way it's decided in the actual debates is that both teams are given the same three topics. They number them 1 to 3 in the order of their choice, then the number threes are eliminated so both teams get their first or second choice. If the teams have not agreed on a first choice, a coin is tossed to decide the topic, then another coin toss to determine which team argues the affirmative and which team the negative position.

The 2013 year 9/10 team of Mya Nipperess, Cameron Pont, Inga Neilsen and Jay Davies is very articulate and they're good holistic thinkers. They are good at understanding the moral dimensions of issues and really coming to grips, in a conversational and humane way, with the topic. They're very thoughtful, they work well together — and because of that they won their zone competition. They lost in the semi-finals to the team that went on to win the competition.

Two of the girls, Inga and Jay were selected for the regional squad, Inga for this years because she's in year 10

and Jay for next year when she'll be in year 10. So with a bit of luck, Braidwood with have a student in the state finals in Sydney for two years running.

This year the BCS Yr 7/8 team coached by Cheryl Hannah won their zone competition and the Yr 5/6 team not only won their zone, but came second in the regional competition. So with 22 BCS primary students doing debating this year we're looking good to have good teams in the years ahead and a bright future for debating in Braidwood.

JULIAN DAVIES



**Jay:**  
"Debating is definitely hardcore thinking for around two hours without a break, but we still can make some pretty stupid and mindless mistakes. One time Inga thought she lost her speech. We all started panicking and raced around, looking under tables and stacks of palm cards. She had put it on the debating table and hadn't lost it in the first place."



**Inga:**  
"I enjoy debating as it gives me the opportunity to expand my knowledge, keep up to date with current affairs, think laterally, meet new people and work together with friends."



**Cameron:**  
"I thoroughly enjoyed debating with Inga, Jay and Mya this year. I believe we work well as a team and our listening skills have developed over the years. When we went away to debating camp we had a lovely time and I feel we debated our best. It was delightful."



**Mya:**  
"Even though we have improved we still stuff up every now and then and can get muddled in our speeches but this doesn't bother us it is all just something to laugh about later."

