

Thukeri

This is a story about two men who lived on the shores of what we now call Lake Alexandrina in South Australia. They belonged to the Ngarrindjeri people.

The two men set off in their bark canoe to go fishing on the lake. They travelled along on the calm, cool waters until they came to their favourite fishing place, called Loveday Bay, where they always caught the best and most delicious bream fish. In our language, this fish is called Thukeri.

They found a good sheltered spot among some high reeds. They had made their own fishing lines, called nungi, from cords they had made from the reeds. They used very sharp bird bones for hooks.

As the day went on the two men sat there catching more and more fat, juicy Thukeri. They were having such a wonderful day catching so many fish and wanted to keep catching more and more, but the canoe was almost full and looked like it would sink.

As they paddled in closer to shore, they could see a stranger in the distance. He seemed to be walking straight towards them. The two men looked at each other; what if this stranger wanted some of their beautiful, juicy Thukeri?

They were greedy and decided not to share with the stranger. They decided to keep all the fat, lovely Silver Bream for themselves and quickly covered the fish up with their woven mats so that the stranger would not see them. When the stranger

came up to the two men he said, 'Hello, brothers. I haven't eaten anything at all today. Could you spare me a couple of fish?'

The two men looked at each other and at the mats hiding the Thukeri. They turned to the stranger and one of them said, 'I'm sorry, friend, but we caught only a few fish today and we have to take them home for our wives and children and the old people, because they are depending on us. So, you see, we can't give you any.'

The stranger stood there for a long while and then started to walk away. He stopped, turned around and stared at them. 'You lied,' he said. 'I know that you have plenty of fish in your canoe. Because you are so greedy, you will never be able to enjoy those Thukeri ever again.'

The two men stood there, puzzled, as the stranger walked away into the sunset. They shrugged their shoulders, then quickly took off the mats and began to gut the fish. But as they did this, they found that these beautiful silver Thukeri were so full of sharp, thin bones that they couldn't eat them.

'What are we going to do? We can't take these home to our families, they'll choke on them.' So the two men had to return home in shame with only the bony fish. When they got home, they told their families what had happened. The old people told them that the stranger was really the Great Spirit called Ngurunderi. Now all the Ngarrindjeri people would be punished for ever, because the two men were so greedy.

And so today, whenever people catch a bony bream, they are reminded of long ago, when Ngurunderi taught them a lesson.

Thukeri - some Idea starters for working with the activity Sheet

The activity sheet can be used in a number of ways besides completing the word puzzle, CONSEQUENCES, and colouring in.

Speech bubbles could be cut out, lettered and pasted on to show what was being said in the conversation around the campfire.

As the children are working issues raised by the story can be discussed , owning up (confession), the response by the old people (forgiveness), living with consequences.... How your tongue can get you into trouble and how you need it to get you out of trouble. How about the fisherman who didn't lie? Was he just as guilty?

Uncle Ken says that the message of the story is also what Jesus teaches, that is to live a true life. What do you think this "true life" means?

For older folk: What might the story be telling us about "covenanting" or reconciliation?

Pronunciation Guide

Thukeri – pronounce the "u" as "oo" in book.

In Ngarrindjeri and Ngurunderi the "g" is silent.

In Ngurunderi the first "u" is as in nut, the second "u" is as "oo"

Acknowledgements

Original story told by: Lela Rankin Retold by Veena Gollan
see <http://www.dreamtime.net.au/thukeri/text.htm>

Permission to use this story has been given by Rev. Ken Sumner.
Ken is a Ngarrindjeri man and is the state chairperson of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

The story has been adapted for use on Reconciliation Sunday 2009.

<http://mrn.sa.uca.org.au/covenanting/reconciliation-sunday.html>