



PRESS RELEASE - MARCH, 2020

AUSTRALIAN AUTHOR CONFRONTS AUSTRALIA'S MOST REMARKABLE MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE— IN A NEW CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOK

Book launch of *AZARIA: A TRUE HISTORY* by Maree Coote

Award-winning author and illustrator Maree Coote tells the tale of Australia's most remarkable miscarriage of justice in *Azaria: A True History*.

This astonishing new picture book is launched in 40th anniversary year of the story that shocked the world: that of baby Azaria taken by a dingo in the Australian outback in 1980.

Media reports at the time accused baby Azaria's mother— Lindy Chamberlain— of murder. Lindy Chamberlain was sentenced and jailed before eventually being exonerated.

Maree Coote tells the tale with care and empathy for all players, while pulling no punches with the grim subject matter.

"From the moment the story of Azaria and Lindy hit the news, I have not been able to forget it," Coote says.

"It is an epic tale, filled with enough archetypal characters to rival a Greek tragedy."

"For an artist, that's pure inspiration."

Coote has been making artworks on the subject for the past 20 years.

"I'm drawn to the story because it touches on themes that we still wrestle with as a nation—the relationship with wilderness, the treatment of indigenous people, and the treatment of women."

"It also contains ideas of the frontier mentality, the incontrovertible nature of the law and of science, the perils of mob-thinking and of prejudice against the 'other', and of course of the media amplification and distortion of a story based on gossip for the purposes of entertainment and sales."

"I wanted to explore what happens when the truth gets lost," she says.

"As a nation, we still have not truly confronted this tragic event."

Coote was inspired by the event itself in 1980, as well as a visit to Uluru in 1985.

These decades of percolating thoughts on Azaria were galvanised by Coote's recent survey of European and Asian folktales.

"These longstanding folktales impressed me with their authenticity and cultural self-awareness," she says.

"They often depict the traps of ignorance or selfishness or prejudice. Many are cautionary tales.

"The culture is vivid in these books. It lives on, and so does the essential truth in the tale.

"That's what is so attractive about them - their unique imagery, unique world view, exotic beauty. Highly decorative, but never *merely* decorative.

"They demonstrate a depth of cultural self-awareness and maturity."

“Aside from Indigenous works, mainstream Australian folklore runs fairly thin. Ned Kelly and ANZAC are set on repeat as national myths. And yet there is so much more to be explored.”

When exhibiting her artworks on the theme, Coote found that the name ‘Azaria’ means nothing to many new and younger Australians.

“The nation’s demographic has changed rapidly and the story is drifting from the national consciousness,” she says.

“That concerned me. Not only for the loss of this wonderful opportunity for a deeper understanding of the things that drive us and derail us, but of course for the safety and awareness for today’s families.”

“I wanted to reiterate the truth for a new generation, which is that this mother did nothing wrong and that this dingo—although the guilty agent—remains an innocent animal.”

Coote described unfolding events at the time as "a perfect storm of ignorances".

“We were as a nation more ready to believe that a loving mother —with no motive, no means, no opportunity and no evidence —would do such an unlikely act,” she says, “while ignoring that a dingo would do exactly what it would do in the wild.

“Lindy Chamberlain paid the price for our ignorance.”

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- Since Azaria was taken there have been 16 more reported dingo attacks, three of these fatal.
 - *Azaria: A True History* is supported by extensive Teachers’ Notes and reference materials made available online for further study.
 - *Azaria: A True History* was celebrated at a justice-themed VIP gathering on February 4th, 2020 at RMIT University’s Capitol Theatre, Swanston Street, in connection with RMIT’s Centre for Innovative Justice, and The Innocence Initiative. Present were the Hon. Justice Lex Lasry AM. Lindy Chamberlain-Creighton and husband Rick Creighton as guests of honour, together with witnesses and original legal teams.
 - An art exhibition of images from (and beyond) the book, will run from February 19-March 30, 2020 at Melbournestyle Gallery, at 155 Clarendon Street South Melbourne, 9696 8445.
 - Coote is an alumnus of RMIT, where she studied Graphic Design, and years later, taught Creative Writing.
 - Maree Coote is author and illustrator of 18 books including:
The Melbourne Book: A History of Now (Winner Gold, IPPY awards NYC)
The Art of Being Melbourne (Winner Gold: RHSV)
When You Go To Melbourne
Alphabet City Melbourne
Andy Web: Artist (Shortlisted book, CBCA)
Robyn Boid: Architect (Shortlisted book, CBCA)
Spellbound: Making Pictures with the A-B-C (Winner Special Mention Non-Fiction, Bologna Ragazzi Award, Italy)
Letters from New York (Winner Silver Moonbeam Award USA)
Animology (Selected for “Beauty and the World’ Best Non Fiction Picture Books Exhibition, Bologna, Italy 2020)
 - For more information, for interviews and for review copies, please contact Lex Ridgeway at Melbournestyle Books, 9696 8445, or contact the author direct on 0419 002 619
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