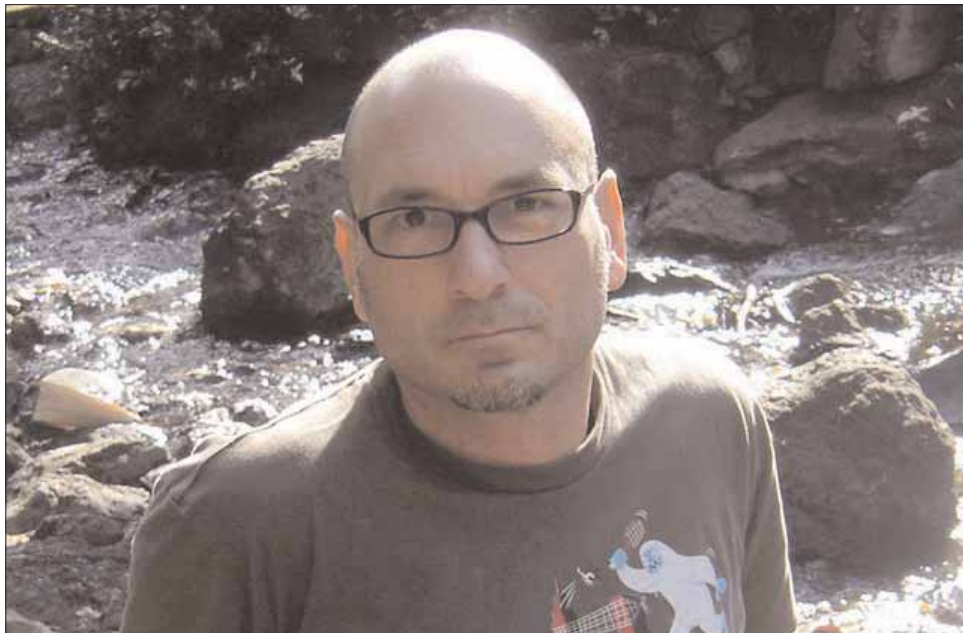


“Riding the Black Cockatoo” by John Danalis

The title of this publication conjures up many possible visualisations. Danalis has interwoven a variety of themes into this unique story of his life and the rigid upbringing as a child. John, a university student in Brisbane, Queensland and the central character, starts a mysterious journey as he tries to come to grips with a strange object kept in his family home.



over ceremony along with the skills of a song man. The Black Cockatoo had emotional significance for John when he started on his journey of hand back.

As an adjunct to the whole handing over ceremony, John visits Melbourne on his way to Swan Hill.

He joins a protest in the Botanical gardens and again highlights the many factors which can affect the reconciliation process open to all Australians.

Trevor Dangerfield, Elisabeth Murdoch

Indigenous Australians) of learning who and where the skull belongs and giving it back. Along the way Danalis learns about his own powers of not giving up and makes some very important friends especially in the Indigenous community. Riding the Black Cockatoo becomes also a journey of Indigenous people, and in particular the Wamba Wamba of the Murray River, to re-connect with their own cultural pride and rediscover their rich heritage.

Riding the Black Cockatoo is about more than that though. Danalis discusses many of his own attitudes (which probably mirror many Australians) and it becomes an important exploration of prejudices and atonement in a nation trying to come to terms with and heal itself from past actions and injustices. The book also explores the power of the media to be both an instrument of good, in publicising an event that every Australian needs to know about, but also a detrimental force, in that it upholds many of the negative stereotypes of Indigenous Australians. Overwhelmingly, Riding the Black Cockatoo



College, VIC Riding the Black Cockatoo is a powerful book about Indigenous Australian and White Australian relations. This book is about reconciliation and in particular about restoring Indigenous Australian pride and culture. The story, written in the form of John Danalis' personal reflection, follows the true account of the giving back of an Aboriginal skull. Danalis grew up with the Aboriginal skull on the mantelpiece of his family home, affectionately called 'Mary'. Through becoming aware of the importance of Indigenous culture when doing a University course, Danalis embarks on a monumental journey (for him, his family and



Mary in his final resting place, shortly before being reburied - © John Danalis

leaves the reader with a strong sense of hope in the future of race relations in Australia and that there can be reconciliation between all Australians on a pragmatic level.

Riding the Black Cockatoo is an essential read for all Australians and could valuably be used in a Year 10 or 11 class in the study of non-fiction text(s) and/or Indigenous literature about reconciliation. Danalis' writing style is very engaging and very truthful about his own attitudes and issues, especially with depression. In this way it seems as though he is speaking directly to the audience rather than lecturing them. He is a composer who befriends the reader with his personal style and draws us into his own personal quest for understanding.

Gersha Shteyman, Kesser Torah College, NSW

A few words about John Danalis

John Danalis grew up surrounded by sick, limping, tick-infested, homesick dogs. While his parents, uncle and aunt ran the family veterinary clinic, young Johnny spent much of his time comforting the canines as they recovered in their cages. Little did he know that the memory of those forlorn doggy faces would one day serve as the ideal reference for a childrens book.

John Danalis is a writer, illustrator and designer. He is the author and illustrator of three children's titles, Dog 37 being the most recent. Bath Monster and Uncle Lou's Tattoos are his earlier works. He has illustrated numerous other titles including Licking Lizards, Girl in the Cave and Loku and the Shark Attack. He has also illustrated textbooks.

John began his art practice as a graphic designer and now runs a studio called Peripheral Vision with his partner, acclaimed illustrator Stella Danalis (<http://peripheralvision.com.au>). In the last 15 years the studio has won over 100 design and illustration awards. Today, John and Stella specialise in book cover design and their own creative projects.