

Barrumbi Kids – Setting, Story and Characters

Excerpt written by Ambience Entertainment and Tamarind Tree Pictures

The fictional town of Mandjakkorl (population 300) is based on the real communities of Beswick and Barunga, 118 and 80 kilometres respectively from Katherine, Northern Territory. This is savannah Country, on the border of south-east Arnhem Land, home to local Aboriginal people (based on the Jawoyn, Mayali, Rembarrnga, Dalabon and Wagalak people of the Beswick region) and a largely transient white population.

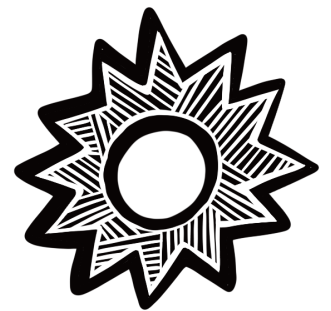
Bordered by billabongs, rivers and low mountain rock escarpments, and accessible only by dirt road and patchy phone and internet services, Mandjakkorl is a long way from the rest of the world. During the wet season, it can be cut off altogether.

The majority of Mandjakkorl's population is Aboriginal, and unspoken and ever-present Aboriginal law dictates the way people live. Relationships aren't straightforward in the Western sense, there are avoidance relationships (people who can't talk or even travel in a school bus together), people you are obligated to (you might have to give them whatever they ask for), or boys and girls who are the wrong skin, forcing them to sit apart. Most white residents respect these customs, even if they don't fully understand them. Some families like Dahlia's go further, working elements of the Indigenous culture into their daily lives. (Lucy is a great believer in bush medicine; Dahlia has an animal totem).

There are exceptions of course, like the paternalistic town administrator Mr Armstrong, who is constantly trying to 'bring the locals into the 21st century'. He is blind to the complexity, history and beauty of Aboriginal culture, and seemingly unaware of his own dated attitudes.

Whitefellas tend to divide the year into two seasons: the steamy, troppo-inducing Wet season and the cloudless days and cool nights of the Dry season. But the local people recognise five seasons:

- JIYOWK (wet weather, during January and February)
- BANGKARRANG (warm and dry, from March until May)
- MALAPARR (cold and dry, from June until August)
- JUNGALK (pre-wet weather, from September until November)
- GURAN (humid and wet weather begins, in December)



Each of these connotes various hunting and harvesting opportunities: times of plenty and scarcity, times for ceremony, pilgrimage and play. Two cultures with very different rhythms that somehow make it work, finding an idiosyncratic harmony that gives Mandjakkorl its unique character.

For our kids, the year is further broken down into school terms and holidays, sporting seasons, birthdays, community events and cultural ceremonies. Whether it's fireworks night, cultural festivals, the annual burn-off, or the start of footy season, there's always something happening in Mandjakkorl. Of course, living in this small community means everyone knows your business. It's hard for Tomias and Dahlia to get away with anything, especially with little sister Lizzie always one step behind, and wise old Caroleena one step ahead!