

# Using literature for rich learning in Geography: the *Through My Eyes* series

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## Introduction

A primary aim of the Australian Curriculum: Geography is to develop in students: "... a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect about places, people, cultures and environments throughout the world" (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014). Global education is committed to the realisation of the "unity and interdependence of human society, developing a sense of self and appreciation of cultural diversity, affirmation of social justice and human rights, as well as building peace and actions for a sustainable future in different times and places" (Global Education, 2014). What better way to achieve these aims in the primary setting than through story? Narrative is a powerful tool for learning – stories help students make sense of their own lives and those of others. The *Through My Eyes* series, published by Allen & Unwin, explores our cultural diversity and shared humanity, informing and challenging our students on their journey towards becoming responsible and active global citizens. *Through My Eyes* is a very timely and unique gift for 21<sup>st</sup> century educators.

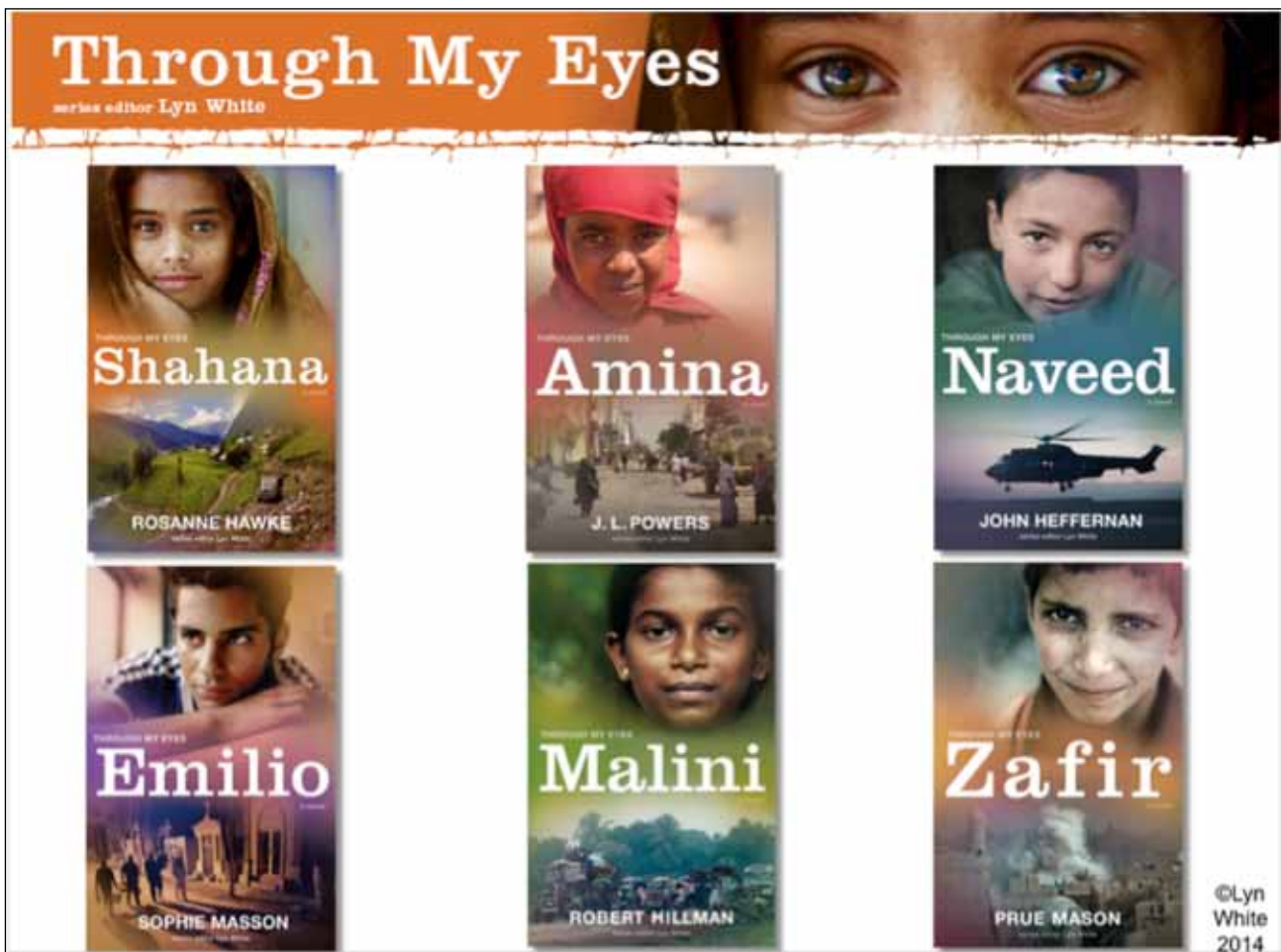


Figure 1: The series

*Through My Eyes* is an engaging, realistic fiction series for 11–14 year olds that presents the lives of children living in contemporary conflict zones. The six stories captivate the reader with diverse geographical settings, historically accurate events, compelling storytelling and a vivid portrayal of culture and identity. Each stand-alone text pays tribute to the courage and perseverance of the thousands of children whose lives have been forever changed by war. Many of these children are in our classrooms and our communities. These sensitive, inclusive, apolitical stories are a perfect resource to encourage a global perspective across the primary curriculum.

Each book has a map, timeline, glossary of ethnic vocabulary and further reading section. Teaching and learning guides, linked to the Australian Curriculum, can be downloaded from the *Through My Eyes* microsite: [www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au](http://www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au).

The contemporary texts include a multiplicity of strong relevant themes that can be explored at various levels of complexity and depth.

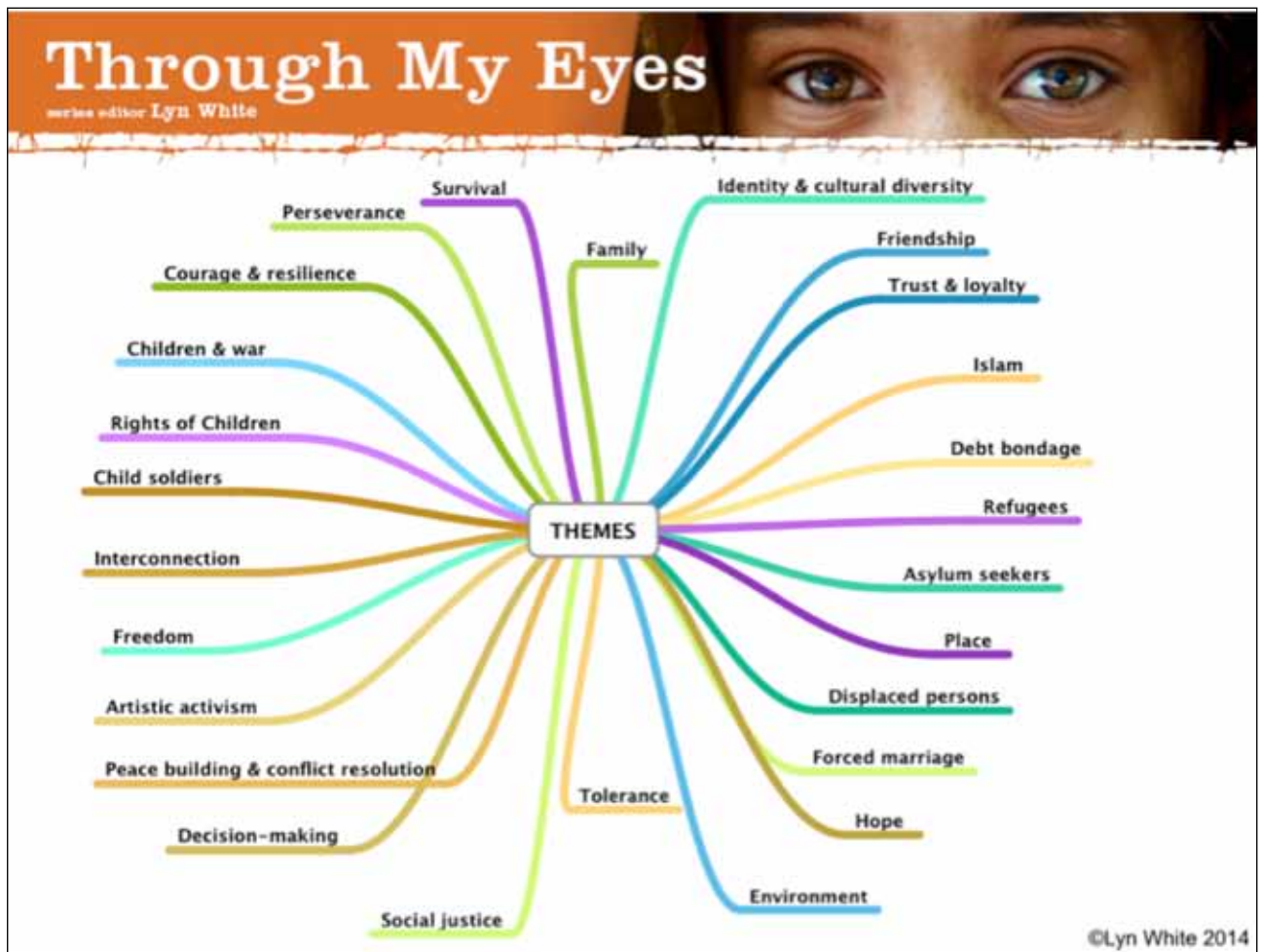


Figure 2: Series themes

### Relevance to the Australian Curriculum

The series strongly supports engagement with the Australian Curriculum/AusVELS: Geography Years 5 and 6. The varied contexts are highly suitable for integrated, inquiry-based learning across several other learning areas including English and AusVELS Physical, Personal and Social Learning, particularly Civics and Citizenship and Interpersonal Development. Two of the six texts, *Shahana* by Rosanne Hawke and *Malini* by Robert Hillman, support the cross-curriculum priority of Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia and all texts link to the general capabilities of Intercultural understanding and Ethical understanding.

### *Through My Eyes* and the Geographical Concepts

The stories focus students' attention on the key concepts of Place, Environment, Interconnection, Sustainability and Change.

#### Book 1: *Shahana* by Rosanne Hawke

Azad Kashmir 2011

Thirteen-year-old orphan Shahana and her brother Tanveer live in a remote mountain village close to the heavily-patrolled Line of Control that separates Pakistani-controlled Kashmir from Indian-occupied Jammu. Shahana's connection to her world is severely compromised on many levels as are her human rights. Following an avalanche, Tanveer is kidnapped by a rogue carpet maker and Shahana must be sold to the highest bidder to secure his release. An Indian militant rescues the children and with the resumption of education, there is renewed hope of a brighter future.

**Book 2: *Amina* by J.L. Powers****Mogadishu, Somalia 2011**

Fourteen-year-old Amina lives with her family in the bombed-out city of Mogadishu. Two decades of civil war, severe drought and famine have devastated the country. When her father is arrested for his political art, and her brother abducted by al-Shabaab, Amina uses her environment, the detritus of war, to create art to inspire fellow Somalis. As al-Shabaab retreat, Amina wonders if the social and economic structures of her world can be rebuilt. She determines to do her best to create a sustainable future for her generation.

**Book 3: *Naveed* by John Heffernan****Bagram, Afghanistan 2014**

Thirteen-year-old Naveed lives with his mother and amputee sister near the US Bagram Airfield. Since his father's death, Naveed cannot attend school but works to sustain his family. He befriends Jake, an Australian explosives detection officer at Bagram. Jake offers Naveed and his dog, Nasera, the chance to train at the base. This unlikely friendship bridges cultural divisions and signals hope for Naveed's future. When cousin Akmed returns from a Pakistani Madrassa, the dangers of Islamic extremism threaten to overcome Naveed's world but his courage and compassion save his family.

**Book 4: *Emilio* by Sophie Masson****Mexico City 2012**

Fourteen-year-old Emilio's world is suddenly turned upside down when a drug cartel gang kidnap his mother and the sinister rumble of the drug war becomes an audible reality. The close-knit Mexican family endure a long, agonising ordeal as they negotiate her release. Emilio's connection with the young Evita, who represents the vulnerable children caught up in the violence and exploitation, creates a gripping text as we see how money, trade and geographical location is dramatically affecting thousands of innocent Mexicans caught up in drug-related violence.

**Book 5: *Malini* by Robert Hillman****Sri Lanka 2009**

Fourteen-year-old Malini and her family are being herded by troops to a narrow enclave in north-east Sri Lanka. Malini and her sister escape into the forest, beginning a dangerous eventful journey to refuge. Malini loves geography and relies upon her skills to navigate herself and a group of orphans through the tropical land so devastated by war.

**Book 6: *Zafir* by Prue Mason (To be published March 2015)****Homs, Syria 2011**

Zafir and his family having recently arrived in Homs from Dubai are caught up in the early days of the conflict that quickly engulfs the country in violence and dislocation. That's all I am telling you at this point – all will be revealed on its release!

The *Through My Eyes* series is already creating rich learning for students and is definitely a valuable resource for teachers and students negotiating the Australian Curriculum: Geography in the primary setting. Please note this article has been written from the perspective of an experienced teacher-librarian and EAL teacher who has entered the publishing industry in order to create the kind of texts our students need to read.

Figure 3: Through My Eyes Curriculum links – the table shows the links and provides a couple of sample lesson activities from the series guides.

Australian Curriculum: Geography and Years 5 and 6 *Through My Eyes*

- a sense of wonder, curiosity and respect about **places, people, cultures and environments** throughout the world
- a deep geographical knowledge of their own locality, Australia, the **Asia-Pacific region and the world**
- **informed, responsible and active citizens** who can contribute to the development of an **environmentally and economically sustainable, and socially just world.**

Australian Curriculum: Geography/Aims

Australian Curriculum/AusVELS	Through My Eyes curriculum links and learning activities
<p><b>Geographical Knowledge &amp; Understanding</b></p> <p><b>Year 5 focus: Factors that shape the human and environmental characteristics of places</b></p> <p><b>Key inquiry questions:</b></p> <p>How do people and environments influence one another?</p> <p>How do people influence the human characteristics of places and the management of spaces within them?</p> <p><b>Content descriptions:</b></p> <p><i>The influence of the environment on the human characteristics of a place. ACHGK028</i></p> <p><i>The influence people have on the human characteristics of places and the management of spaces within them. ACHGK029</i></p> <p><b>Achievement standard</b></p> <p>They [students] describe the interconnections between people, places and environments and identify the effect of these interconnections on the characteristics of places and environments. They describe the location of selected countries in relative terms and identify spatial distributions and simple patterns in the features of places and environments.</p>	<div data-bbox="671 810 1187 1317" data-label="Diagram"> </div> <p>Students discover the crucial interdependence of characters and their environment – environments compromised by conflict, famine, drought and corruption. Students investigate featured climatic events and natural hazards such as: avalanche, earthquake, drought, famine and flood.</p> <p><b>Learning activity: Climate and the human characteristics of places</b></p> <p><b>Curriculum link</b></p> <p><i>Students describe the location of selected countries . . . They describe the interconnections between people, places and environments . . . They present findings using geographical terminology in a range of communication forms. They represent data and location of places in graphic forms, including large-scale and small-scale maps that use the cartographic conventions of border, scale, legend, title and north point. AusVELS/Geography/Year 5/ Achievement Standard</i></p>

<p><b>Year 6 focus: A diverse and connected world</b></p> <p><b>Key inquiry questions:</b> How do people and cultures differ across the world?</p> <p>What are Australia's global connections between people and places? How do people's connections to places affect their perception of them?</p> <p><b>Content descriptions</b> <i>The location of major countries of the Asia region in relation to Australia and the geographical diversity within the region.</i> ACHGK031</p> <p><i>The various connections Australia has with other countries and how these connections change people and places... and shape their awareness and opinion of those places.</i> ACHGK035 &amp; ACHGK036</p>	<p><b>Tuning in</b></p> <p>Read pp. 4, 46 and 142 of <i>Malini</i> by Robert Hillman</p> <p>Malini lives in the tropical climate of Sri Lanka. Her journey to safety is both assisted and restricted by her environment, so devastated by the Sri Lankan War.</p> <p>Using a PNI graphic organiser, list the features of Malini's climate that affect her positively and negatively and list questions you have about the climate.</p> <p><b>Finding out and sorting out</b></p> <p>Research the tropical climate of Sri Lanka and represent Malini's journey and the location of major text and climatic events on your own map. How has the conflict altered the environment? What influence does Malini and her father have on their final place of refuge?</p> <p><b>Going further</b></p> <p>Compare the Sri Lankan climate and environment with tropical areas of Australia.</p> <p>How have UNICEF and the Australian Government reconnected Sri Lankan children with safe places such as schools?</p> <p>View: <a href="http://www.srilanka.embassy.gov.au/clmb/2812014AustralianGovernmentandUNICEF2812014">www.srilanka.embassy.gov.au/clmb/2812014AustralianGovernmentandUNICEF2812014</a> AustralianGovernmentandUNICEF.html</p>
<p><b>Levels 5 &amp; 6: Move to world, regional and global scales.</b></p> <p><i>Shahana</i> – Azad Kashmir/Pakistan, <i>Amina</i> – Mogadishu, Somalia, <i>Naveed</i> – Bagram, Afghanistan</p> <p><i>Emilio</i> – Mexico City, <i>Malini</i> – Sri Lanka, <i>Zafir</i> – Homs, Syria</p> <p>The characters' identities are strongly linked to their culture that guides their connections with people and place. The stories raise contemporary questions and promote personal and group reflection and debate: Where do refugees come from? Why would families be so desperate to leave their homeland? Why do they come to Australia? How are children's rights violated across the world?</p>	

Global connections and perceptions are supported and challenged by engagement with the sensitive, apolitical, non-stereotypic texts. Our students share classrooms with migrants and refugees from text countries of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Somalia. Opportunities for informed empathy and understanding.



**Learning activity: Location of Afghanistan and Afghani culture**

**Curriculum link**

*By the end of Year 6, students explain the characteristics of diverse places in different locations at different scales from local to global. Australian Curriculum/ Geography/Year 6/Achievement Standard*

**Tuning in**

Using Google Maps or Google Earth, locate Afghanistan and key cities. View in relation to Australia. Locate US Bagram Airfield. Look at terrain and satellite views to gain a sense of the landscape that is Naveed's home.

**Finding out and sorting out**

Read chapter one of *Naveed* by John Heffernan.

Using a Y-chart graphic organiser (Looks like, Feels like, Sounds like) list words and phrases that suggest Afghan culture. Using the text glossary, investigate the different language, religion and other Afghan cultural markers.

**Going further**

View Global Education Afghanistan profile at: [www.globaleducation.edu.au/2355.html](http://www.globaleducation.edu.au/2355.html)

View CARITAS Afghanistan Media Gallery: [www.caritas.org.au/learn/multimedia/multimediatetail?Focus=&Region=&LibraryName=Afghanistan](http://www.caritas.org.au/learn/multimedia/multimediatetail?Focus=&Region=&LibraryName=Afghanistan)

<p><b>Cross-curriculum priorities</b>  <b>Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia</b></p>	<p>Shahana – Kashmir/Pakistan                  Malini – Sri Lanka</p>
<p><b>Organising ideas</b>                  OI.1 <i>The peoples and countries of Asia are diverse in ethnic background, traditions, cultures, belief systems and religions.</i>                  OI.8 <i>Australians of Asian heritage have influenced Australia's history and continue to influence its dynamic culture and society.</i></p>	<p><b>Curriculum link</b>  <i>Students can explore groups of countries, individual countries, or specific regions and locations within countries. In doing so, they develop knowledge and skills that help foster intercultural understanding as they come to appreciate the diversity that exists between and within the countries of Asia, and how this diversity influences the way people perceive and interact with places and environments.</i>  <b>Geography/Overview/Cross-curriculum priority/Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia</b></p>
<p><b>Sustainability – environmental and social</b></p> <p><b>Organising ideas</b>                  OI.3 <i>Sustainable patterns of living rely on the interdependence of healthy social, economic and ecological systems.</i>                  OI.4 <i>World views that recognise the dependence of living things on healthy ecosystems, and value diversity and social justice are essential for achieving sustainability.</i></p>	<p><b>Curriculum link</b>  <i>Sustainability education is futures-oriented, focussing on protecting environments and creating a more ecologically and socially just world through informed action. Actions that support more sustainable patterns of living require consideration of environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and their interdependence.</i>  <b>Australian Curriculum/Cross-curriculum priorities/Sustainability</b>                  Social sustainability is threatened by conflict due to the following factors:                  Destruction of family structures due to death and loss of male members                  Dislocation and displacement as homes and environments become unsustainable                  Opportunities for continuous education and health management are severely compromised.                  Strong text theme is violation of children's rights: debt bondage, child marriage, child soldiers, child labour, disrupted schooling, poverty and injustice.</p>

**General capabilities**

**Intercultural understanding**

Investigate culture and cultural identity.  
Explore and compare cultural knowledge, beliefs and practices.  
Develop respect for cultural diversity.

**Critical and creative thinking**

Generate and evaluate knowledge, clarify concepts and ideas, seek possibilities, consider alternatives and solve problems.

**Ethical understanding**

Recognise ethical concepts.  
Explore ethical concepts in contexts that include an ethical dimension.

Engagement with the series challenges cultural stereotypes and promotes discussion of intercultural similarities and respect for cultural difference.

**Curriculum link**

*Through opportunities to study the lives, cultures, values and beliefs of people in different places, students learn to appreciate and interpret different perspectives and to challenge stereotypical or prejudiced representations of social and cultural groups where they exist.*

**Australian Curriculum / Geography / General Capabilities / Overview / Intercultural Understanding**

**Learning activity: Islam and religious extremism**

Identity and cultural diversity – an understanding of self and one’s culture and being open to the cultures of others.

**Tuning in**

Islam is the predominant religion in Afghanistan. Naveed’s practice of Islam is in stark contrast to his cousin’s Akmed’s interpretation. The Taliban represents an example of religious extremism.

Using a KWL chart, brainstorm what you know about Islam and what you want to know.

Read page 13 of the *Naveed* Teaching and Learning Guide: [www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au/files/Naveed\\_teachersnotes.pdf](http://www.throughmyeyesbooks.com.au/files/Naveed_teachersnotes.pdf)

Add what you have learned about Islam to your KWL chart.

Read pp. 123,160 & 161 of *Naveed*.

**Finding out and sorting out**

Add further information from sites such as: [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religion/islam/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religion/islam/)

Inquiry Question: Is Islam the only religion that has extremists?

Text comparison: Compare religious extremism as presented in *Amina* and *Naveed* : al-Shabaab and the Taliban.

**Going further**

Watch and discuss the Malala Yousafzai interview at: <http://live.worldbank.org/conversation-with-malala>.

Read: *Every Day is Malala Day* by Rosemary McCarney.