One night, when the young moon had risen and they were sitting around the fire, Charlie Warragin, the head stockman, looked at John’s mother and said, ‘Liyan, I have heard they are coming to take away your son in the morning.’

John Jagamurra felt his mother become very tense, her fear flowing into himself. She held him tighter in her arms and cried, ‘Who is coming to take him away? Where will they take him?’

‘The Big Man from Welfare,’ said Charlie Warragin. ‘I have heard he is travelling with the police truck to all the camps in this part of the country, and taking the light-skinned ones to the Fathers at Pearl Bay. He was with the mob at Richmond Downs the day before yesterday. He will be here tomorrow.’

‘When will they bring my son back to me?’

‘He will not be coming back,’ said Charlie Warragin. And the old man, Jabal, who knew much and taught the law to the young men, agreed. ‘They will bring him up in the ways of the white man. It will be many years before he can return, but his life will never be the same.’

‘They cannot do this thing!' cried Liyan.

‘They can, and they will. It is the law of the white man that says so.’

‘I will tell the Boss ... tell Mrs Grainger. She will stop them.’

‘She will be able to do nothing.’

‘I love my son! This is his family! They cannot come to take him away!’

‘They have been coming from the day he was born,’ said Jabal.

by Anthony Hill
from The Burnt Stick (Viking)
Teaching notes for
The Burnt Stick

**Creating Depictions**

The nouns that represent people mentioned in the extract are: John; John’s mother; Liyan; Charlie Warragin; the Big Man from Welfare; Mrs Grainger; the Boss; Jabal; and the Fathers at Pearl Bay. Ask students to draw a literary sociogram to show the nature of the relationships between the people.

In their depictions students should express the emotion attributed to each person, not portray the scene described in the extract. When students have frozen in their depictions ask some members of the group to contribute thought and speech bubbles. Alternatively observers can contribute the thought or speech bubbles, enabling the students to gauge the effectiveness of the depiction on the viewer.

**Point of View**

Students are to continue this extract starting from the complication when ‘The Big Man from Welfare’ arrives to take John away. They should plan their narratives carefully working with the different stages of the narrative in a flexible way. They must describe the complications, series of events and the resolution but in an order that suits the storyline they create. Provide time for a writing conference and encourage students to revise, edit and proofread.

**Research the Facts**

This novel is a realistic narrative. Although the events in the novel are fictitious, the central idea is factual, based on those that could have occurred. Ask students to research this topic. Ensure they are familiar with strategies, such as skimming and scanning, and know how to use library technology. Help them to critically evaluate information from different sources.

**Follow-up/Extension**

- Encourage students to read the whole novel The Burnt Stick.
- Ask the librarian for other literary texts that portray contemporary issues relating to Aboriginals e.g. The Girl with No Name by Pat Lowe.
What do you feel?

How did you feel as you read the extract? Write your response on the lines below.

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Talk with a partner about the text. What do you think it might be about? Discuss the terms: ‘the light-skinned ones’, ‘the Fathers at Pearl Bay’, ‘the Big Man from Welfare’, ‘the mob’. What do you think these terms mean? Write your conclusions on the lines below.

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The ‘law’ is mentioned twice in the text. What do you think the term means each time? Talk with a partner and write your answer.

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What is meant by: ‘They have been coming from the day he was born’?
Creating depictions

List the nouns that represent people in the extract.

Create a sociogram which shows the relationships between these people. This sort of diagram is called a sociogram.

Show your diagram to a partner and explain it.

A depiction is a still picture created from human bodies and some props. Now, work with a group to create a depiction of the people in your diagram.

Create a second depiction to portray the scene where ‘the Big Man from Welfare’ comes to take John away.

Write a caption for each of your depictions.

Depiction 1:

Depiction 2:

NA 4.3 NSW 3.4 Controls and evaluates structures and features of spoken language. Interprets meaning and develops and presents ideas and information in familiar surroundings.

NA 4.5 NSW 3.5 Reads an extensive range of texts with fairly complex structures and features, justifying own interpretation of ideas, information and events in the response to themes and issues.

NA 4.7 NSW 3.8 Identifies the structures of different texts and with assistance discusses the grammatical structures and features that shape readers' and listeners' understanding of texts.
The Burnt Stick

Point of view

Continue this extract starting from the complication when ‘the Big Man from Welfare’ arrives to take John away. Imagine that you are John and write in the first person (I). Plan your story carefully describing the complications, series of events and resolutions but change the order to suit your storyline. Revise, edit and proofread your draft and write the final copy below.
Research the facts

This is the preface to the novel, *The Burnt Stick*:

*Although the incidents described in this story are mostly fictional, they are based on a central fact. It was the practice by the authorities in many parts of Australia, until as late as the 1960s, to take Aboriginal children of mixed parentage away from their mothers, and to have them brought up either in institutions or with foster parents.*

–Anthony Hill, Canberra, 1994

Visit the library to research the laws relating to the practice mentioned in the preface.

In which Australian states did the practice occur?


When did the practice cease in each state?


What factors contributed to having the practice stopped?


Could the events described in the preface occur today? Write your opinion and the reasons for your opinion.
The Burnt Stick & Rabbit Proof Fence. What is the representation of Indigenous Australians in this passage? How is the moment when the children are stolen represented in both texts?