



GRACEY'S TOTEM



Every day counts.

qld.gov.au/everydaycounts

About the author

Nola Turner-Jensen is a Wiradjuri (weir rad jury) woman from the river country in Central West New South Wales, although has happily called Queensland home for most of her life. Nola is a published Aboriginal author of several children's books that are celebrated on NITV and in schools and childcare centres around Australia.

About the artist

The cultural pattern on the Totem Turtle has been developed by Rachael Sarra. Rachael is an Aboriginal artist from Goreng Goreng Country. Each arch represents a journey and each dot represents the experiences guiding Gracey.

About the books

There is a strong correlation between school attendance and positive student outcomes. The **Every day counts** campaign focuses on the importance of attending school every day of the school year. The Department of Education has produced a suite of student-friendly resources promoting the importance of going to school, every day. Each of the books in this series has a different story and is at a different reading ability level.

The information supplied inside the back cover may assist teachers in their delivery of targeted reading instruction. The Fry's high frequency words are lists in order of the most common words used in print, developed through the research of Dr Edward Fry. Learning all 1000 words in the Fry's lists would equip a child to read about 90% of the words in a typical book, newspaper or website. Mastering these words supports students' reading development and forms part of effective literacy instruction.

For more information and resources visit the *Every day counts* website at qld.gov.au/everydaycounts

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“This is SOOO boring,” said Gracey to her friend Jimmy.

One second later, Uncle and the teacher walked in carrying a mystery package between them.

“What’s going on?” asked Gracey and Jimmy.

They jumped up to see what Uncle and the teacher were carrying. It was an injured turtle!

“Don’t just stand there!” snapped the big, old turtle, looking at Gracey. “Help me. I am your family,” said the turtle.



"Did you hear that?" a shocked Gracey asked Jimmy and Uncle.

"Hear what?" asked a confused Jimmy.

"That turtle spoke to me," said Gracey. "Didn't you hear it?" she asked, looking from Uncle to Jimmy.

"Good one Gracey," said Jimmy. "What did he say? 'I am really a prince so pucker up, tidda'," said Jimmy, laughing at his own joke.



"Move away, Gracey and Jimmy, if you can't be serious," said the teacher in a stern voice. While the teacher rang the local vet, Uncle and Jimmy went to get some water in a tub.

"Why don't you help me?" asked the turtle angrily, looking at Gracey. "It is tribal law to help your family!" he said loudly.

Gracey was now very confused and a little frightened.



Gracey looked closely at the large turtle's head. Both its eyes were beginning to close. Gracey thought it might be almost asleep.

"Who are you and why am I the only one who can hear you?" asked a frightened Gracey.

The turtle opened its eyes slowly and took a long time to speak, but at last, the old turtle replied. "You can hear me because I am a totem ancestor of this country and part of *your* family, not the family of anyone else here. Listen to my important story."

"For a long, long time, Aboriginal people have believed that families have a special connection to living things and they must watch over each other," sighed the tired turtle.



“Where do you come from?” Gracey asked in a small voice.

“The place I am from is far from here. I have swum through the sea and up huge rivers with an injured fin to get here,” explained the turtle. “Use your skill to heal me.”

“I’m not a ranger or a vet,” said Gracey sadly.

“I would like to be, but I am not great at school. Also, I am just a kid, so I can’t help you.”

“The strength of your ancestors is inside you, just like in me. You can do anything. You just need to come to school every day to learn. Then you can be whatever you want,” the turtle said wisely.



Gracey turned to look up at Uncle as he sat down near her and the injured turtle.

"Can you really hear the turtle?" asked Uncle softly.

"Yes," replied Gracey in a small voice. "Do you think I am womba, Uncle?"

"Tell me what he said to you," said Uncle thoughtfully.

"He said he is my totem ancestor and a part of my family," replied Gracey.

"Then that is truth," said Uncle seriously. "You must listen to his words, Gracey," added Uncle.

"I don't know about totems," sighed Gracey. "I wish I knew more. I wish I knew how to help him."

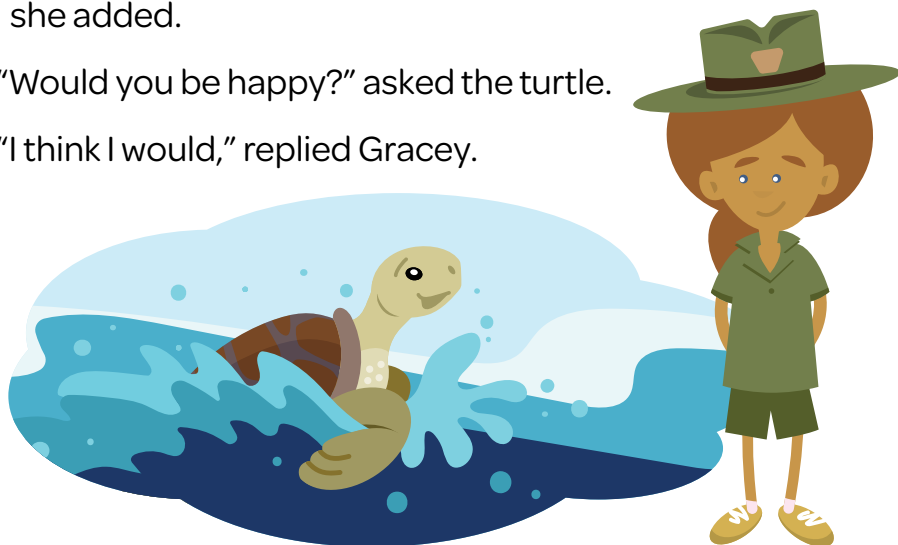
"Believe in him, Gracey," said Uncle.

The turtle spoke again. "Tell me what your life could be like if you became a ranger or a vet?"

"I could work at the beach every day and be able to help all living things," said an excited Gracey. "And help you," she added.

"Would you be happy?" asked the turtle.

"I think I would," replied Gracey.



"Then you should work hard for your family. Make every day count at school. Show your community that you can try hard and study hard. I will be here when you need me, you can't do it alone. As a people we have never done things on our own. We always work together," it said softly with a smile.

While the turtle was still talking to Gracey, the teacher came to carry it carefully out to the vet. As it left, the turtle called out his last words to Gracey. "By healing living things, you can continue the important cultural responsibility of your ancestors."

Did you know?

Murri people's totems are living or non-living things, such as animals, plants, places, or even stars and planets. Their totems are connected to the land, sea or sky of the Country on which they live.

When the ancestors left for the sky world (after they finished their work on Earth), they left their spirit or essence in certain spots, on or in each Murri language group's lands. Thus, they were bandicoots in certain places, snakes in others or eagles in other places and so on. This explains why the land has always been so important to Murri people.

**Murri – Aboriginal person from Queensland and northern New South Wales.*

Did you also know?

In Queensland, there used to be more than 100 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander traditional languages and dialects spoken. Language is important, it's how we communicate. Try posting on social media, texting or emailing without language!

Every day counts when you are learning to read.



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Word count

695

Text type

Narrative

**Independent
readability age**

8 – 10 years

Hard words (3+ syllable words)

carrying, mystery, family, serious, angrily, ancestor,
Aboriginal, traditional, ancestors, anything, seriously,
excited, community, cultural, responsibility, whatever,
carefully, beginning, important, together

**Key vocabulary**

boring, Gracey, friend, Jimmy, second, teacher, walked, carrying, between,
package, what's, jumped, injured, turtle, don't, there, snapped, looking,
shocked, answered, confused, didn't, really, prince, pucker, laughing, voice,
tribal, loudly, little, frightened, looked, closely, country, thought, almost,
anyone, replied, people, believed, living, things, always, sighed, ranger,
school, rivers, injured, explained, strength, inside, learn, wisely, softly, uncle,
worried, listen, totems, believe, became, happy, smiling, alone, talking,
called, healing, again, stern

Aboriginal**English words**

Uncle	a respectful name given to male Aboriginal Elders
tidda	female friend, peer
womba	crazy, silly

Fry's First 100 high frequency words in this text (82 words):

the	was	this	were	do	so	see	long
of	for	have	we	how	some	way	down
and	on	from	when	their	her	could	day
a	are	or	your	if	would	people	did
to	as	one	can	will	make	my	get
in	with	by	said	up	like	water	come
is	his	words	there	other	him	called	part
you	they	but	use	about	time	who	
that	I	not	an	out	look	am	
it	at	what	she	then	more	its	
he	be	all	each	them	go	now	

Fry's Second 100 high frequency words in this text (47 words):

over	live	just	help	show	because	need	away
only	me	good	through	also	turn	land	study
little	back	think	old	small	here	move	still
work	very	say	tell	large	why	try	learn
know	things	great	came	must	ask	kind	should
place	our	where	want	big	went	again	

Fry's Third 100 high frequency words in this text (40 words):

every	last	under	close	both	carry	really
near	school	story	hard	together	hear	almost
add	never	left	open	side	second	talk
between	eyes	don't	beginning	sea	later	family
own	thought	while	life	took	watch	
country	head	might	always	river	far	



MORE ADVENTURES WITH JIMMY AND SAM THE DOG

Gracey gets very worried when only she can hear an injured turtle needing her help. Uncle helps Gracey to understand her mysterious connection to the turtle and the importance of making every day count at school.

Can you spot '**Team EDC**' on Uncle's shirt?

This stands for '**Every day counts**' because it's important to go to school every day.

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