



Book Club Book of the Month October 2021

***Flock: First Nations Stories Then and Now* curated by Ellen van Neerven (University of Queensland Press)**

Summary

Flock: First Nations Stories Then and Now, curated and introduced by award-winning author Ellen van Neerven, brings together twenty different short stories from First Nations writers. The collection features established writers including Alf Taylor, Tony Birch, Melissa Lucashenko and Tara June Winch, as well as rising stars like Cass Lynch, Adam Thompson and Mykaela Saunders. The stories explore numerous themes and subjects, including the Stolen Generations, inter-generational trauma, the bonds of brotherhood and family, connection to Country, spirituality, and more. *Flock* is a deeply moving and important collection that shares the power of First Nations storytelling across several generations of writers.

Contributors in this anthology include Tara June Winch, Herb Wharton, Archie Weller, Samuel Wagan Watson, Ellen van Neerven, Michael Torres, Adam Thompson, Jared Thomas, Alf Taylor, Melanie Saward, Mykaela Saunders, SJ Norman, Jasmin McGaughey, Cass Lynch, Melissa Lucashenko, Jeanine Leane, Gayle Kennedy, Jane Harrison, Tony Birch and Bryan Andy.

About the curator

Ellen van Neerven is an award-winning writer of Mununjali Yugambeh (South East Queensland) and Dutch heritage. Ellen's first book, *Heat and Light*, was the recipient of the David Unaipon Award, the Dobbie Literary Award and the NSW Premier's Literary Awards Indigenous Writers Prize. They have written two poetry collections: *Comfort Food*, which was shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards Kenneth Slessor Prize; and *Throat*, which was shortlisted for the Queensland Literary Awards and the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards.

Questions for discussion

1. In their introduction, Ellen van Neerven explains that the title *Flock* was inspired by contributor Jeanine Leane's obituary for beloved Kuracca Kerry Reed-Gilbert, or Auntie KRG, who 'like the kuracca, that is a sentinel bird – always watching over the rest of the mob, Auntie Kerry nurtured, encouraged and inspired a generation of writers'. In what ways did you find this sentiment reflected throughout the stories in this anthology?
2. The stories span a publication period of 25 years. Based on the stories presented here, how do you think the experience of First Nations people has changed in those years?
3. Although wide-ranging across themes, generations, geographies and genres, *Flock* is a cohesive collection. Why do you think that's the case?
4. Many of the stories talk about the Stolen Generations. How have these stories affected your understanding of trauma and inter-generational trauma?
5. In 'Cloud Busting' by Tara June Winch, the main character recounts a story of hope. What do you think she is saying about the friendship between her mum and Samuel the travelling salesman?
6. Archie Weller's 'Shadows on the Wall' and Samuel Wagan Watson's 'The Release' both speak to the bond of brotherhood. In what ways are they similar, and in what ways are they different, in their telling?
7. 'Each City' by Ellen van Neerven is set in a futuristic Australia with a more inclusive understanding of sexuality. However, First Nations peoples are segregated into different cities, and activists like the main character are in danger of being incarcerated. What do you think this story is saying about the current experiences of First Nations people in Australia?
8. Many stories talk of the past and current treatment of First Nations peoples. What do you think the authors are saying in the stories 'Honey' by Adam Thompson and 'Galah' by Melanie Saward?
9. In 'Split', Cass Lynch reimagines Boorloo/Perth existing as its current self and past self pre-colonisation. As the story progresses, the Swan River becomes once again the Ancient River, the Bilya. What is the significance of the story's title, and what do you think is explored in this piece?

If you liked this book you may also like ...

God, the Devil and Me by Alf Taylor, Magabala Books, 2021

maar bidi: next generation black writing, edited Linda Martin and Elfie Shiosaki, Magabala Books, 2020

Where the Fruit Falls by Karen Wyld, UWA Publishing, 2020

Meet Me at the Intersection, edited Rebecca Lim and Ambelin Kwaymullina, Fremantle Press, 2018

Further reading ...

Born Into This by Adam Thompson, University of Queensland Press, 2021

Dark as Last Night by Tony Birch, University of Queensland Press, 2021

Permafrost by SJ Norman, University of Queensland Press, 2021

Fire Front edited Alison Whittaker, University of Queensland Press, 2020

Throat by Ellen van Neerven, University of Queensland Press, 2020

Too Much Lip by Melissa Lucashenko, University of Queensland Press, 2018

The Visitors by Jane Harrison, Currency Press, 2021

The Yield by Tara June Winch, Penguin Books Australia, 2019

Walk Back Over by Jeanine Leane, Cordite Books, 2018

