

Teachers' Notes Bungawitta

Emily Rodda

Teachers' notes written by Kate Rowe



OMNIBUS BOOKS

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INTRODUCTION

Set in a fictional Australian country town, with a raft of colourful characters, *Bungawitta* is a humorous story for readers aged 8-11.

Jay lives with his parents and little sister Glory-Alice in a small town called Bungawitta (pronounced with a hard 'g' as in 'kanga'). Bungawitta has struggled through drought for a long time. Once a busy place, it has shrunk over the years as families and businesses moved away. There are only twelve stubborn locals left, and they are running out of water and money. How can they save their town before time runs out?

Jay comes up with the idea of a festival to raise money: the very first Bungawitta Earth Sculpture Festival. He suggests they encourage tourists from the city to visit and compete in a clay sculpture building competition. The locals love the idea, and begin work on planning and promoting the festival. A motley crew, their different talents prove extremely useful when they work as a team. There's Cookie Liu, who supplies the food, Lola Riley, who helps promote the festival, Ben Wise, the talented artist who supplies a painting as first prize ... From little Glory-Alice to elderly, forgetful Maisie Macduff, everyone has a part to play in the lead-up to the big day.

But when Festival Day arrives, the locals must struggle with their own private doubts. After all their hard work, will anyone even come? Does their humble town have what it takes to entertain a city crowd? Why on earth has the ABC promised 'Satisfaction Guaranteed Or Your Money Back?' And will the ABC TV crew turn up to film the awarding of first prize, as promised?

The story takes delightful twists and turns as the Bungawitta Earth Sculpture Festival progresses, culminating in an outcome that nobody would have expected, and a very happy ending for Bungawitta.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Rodda's real name is Jennifer Rowe. She was born in Sydney and completed an MA (Hons) in English Literature at Sydney University in 1973. She worked in publishing for many years, as an editor and then a publisher at Angus & Robertson, before becoming the editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly* magazine in 1988.

Always a keen reader and writer, Emily began writing children's stories in her spare time to entertain her young daughter Kate. She submitted her first manuscript to Angus & Robertson using a pseudonym — her grandmother's name, Emily Rodda — to make sure that she got an honest opinion of her work from her colleagues. This book, *Something Special*, won the Children's Book Council of Australia Book of the Year Award, as did four other of her books in subsequent years: *Pigs Might Fly*, *The Best-Kept Secret*, *Finders Keepers*, and *Rowan of Rin*.

A full-time writer since 1992, Emily Rodda has published over 90 books. In recent times she is best known for the popular *Deltora Quest* fantasy series which has sold more than any other Australian series, has been made into a successful animated TV series in Japan, and is published in over thirty countries around the world.

In 1995 Emily Rodda won the prestigious Dromkeen Medal. The judges of the award said of her that she 'maintains a prolific writing schedule, continues to provide a role model in promoting children's literature, and still spends many hours sharing her love of books with children and educators'. She has also won many different Kids' Choice Awards across Australia. She has won two Aurealis Awards, for *Deltora Quest Series 1* and also *Deltora Book of Monsters* with Marc McBride in 2002, and for *The Wizard of Rondo*, the second book in her *Rondo* trilogy, in 2008.

Emily has also written eight mysteries for adults under her real name, Jennifer Rowe. She has four children, and lives in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney.

For further information please consult Emily Rodda's online biography at <http://www.emilyrodda.com>.

WRITING STYLE

Bungawitta is written in a light, funny, positive style and the characters often use old-fashioned Australian colloquialisms. The style highlights the quirky characters, and makes their harsh predicament easier to digest.

The themes of *Bungawitta* include drought, problems facing Australian country towns, the city/country divide, problem-solving, the power of teamwork, cooperation, community, friendship and individual talent.

BEFORE READING THE TEXT

Australia's landscape is prone to drought and flooding. Depending on your region, students may already be familiar with water restrictions, or with floods. Before reading *Bungawitta*, students could discuss as a class their existing knowledge of weather conditions or drought/flooding events in different parts of Australia.

READING THE TEXT

The teacher might like to read the first chapters to the class, and ask the first comprehension questions orally, either for students to work on alone or in pairs, or as part of a class discussion. The teacher could continue to read the text, or ask the students to continue reading on their own.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE TEXT

Students could answer these questions verbally, alone or in pairs, or as a written task to be handed in. In some cases the questions may spoil the story, so you might like to hand them out only after everyone has finished the relevant chapter.

Chapter 1:

- What do the residents of Bungawitta do when they meet every morning?
A) They drink tea and watch the weather report on TV.
- Why does Glory-Alice hate the weatherman?
A) Because he never gives them rain (she thinks he controls the weather).
- What happens to Flo and Cookie when it is about to rain?
A) Flo's bad knee hurts, and Cookie's head aches.
- How do you think Cookie got his nickname?
A) He won a cooking prize once (or perhaps simply because he's good at cooking).
- What is on the TV breakfast show after the weather?
A) A broadcast from a garden gnome festival.
- What is the problem in Bungawitta? What two things does Adam say they need, and why?

A) The problem is that they are stuck with a long drought. Adam says they need rain and money: Money for seed, stock, and food, and rain to fill the water tanks, and to make the crops grow.

- What did the fields of Bungawitta used to look like? What do they look like now?
A) They used to be green and gold, now they are brown and bare.
- What do the residents think are the good things about Bungawitta, things that tourists might like?
A) Fresh air, space, blue sky, sunsets and sunrises, stars.

Chapter 2:

- Start a list of the twelve people who live in Bungawitta, plus their animals, with a brief description of who they are.
A: Glory-Alice (a little girl), Jay (her brother), Annie (their mother, a photographer), Adam (their father, a farmer), Maisie Macduff (an old lady), Aunty Flo (who runs the general store), Cookie Liu (who used to work in the post office and cooks well), Greasy Cooper (a mechanic), Ben Wise (a fence-mender and artist), Socko Riley (a grumpy 16 yr old), Mick Riley (Socko's father, a farmer), Lola Riley (Socko's mother, who used to work in an office – N.B. Lola is not mentioned until Chapter 3), Brownie and Blue (the dogs), Meg (a Shetland pony), chooks, two crows and Maisie Macduff's cat Bruce (in the illustrations, and mentioned in Chapter 5).
- Who is the only person who isn't excited about the festival?
A) Socko Riley.
- Why is it good that the festival is on a full moon night?
A) Because there are no outdoor lights, except for the flares left over from Annie and Adam's wedding.
- What can the people of Bungawitta afford to do with the money they have?
A) Buy a truckload of bottled water, hire portable toilets, put ads in the city papers, pay for insurance, buy bread and sausages, and some white T-shirts to screen-print.
- Who will provide the rest of the food, and how?
A) Aunty Flo, using the stock in her shop.
- How does Maisie Macduff offer to help?
A) She offers to knit tea cosies for sale, and play the piano at the festival.

Chapter 3:

- How did the ABC find out about the festival?

A) Maisie called her old school friend, whose great-grandson works at the ABC. Although it is never actually stated in the text, we can assume that Maisie's friend told her great-grandson.

- Why does the ABC think there will be great music?
A) Because Maisie must have said so, knowing that she will be playing the piano.
- Why does the ABC think it is 'Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back'?
A) Because Maisie must have said so, inspired by the ad on the wall of Flo's shop that she stares at for hours each day while sitting on her verandah.
- The people of Bungawitta work as a team to make the festival happen. What does each person do, or give, in Chapter 3? Who is the only person who doesn't do anything?
A) Annie: drew designs, made screens, screen-printed T-shirts.
Lola Riley: wrote the press release, sent copies to papers, radio and TV, printed posters and asked her friends in the city to stick them on lampposts, kept the accounts, paid the festival bills, gave Ben her curtains to make banners.
Aunty Flo: made chutney and jam, gave cord for Jay's flags.
Cookie: made fruit cakes, gave crepe paper for Jay's flags.
Greasy: helped clear the big paddock, serviced the tractor.
Adam: helped clear the paddock, then ploughed it.
Mick Riley: helped clear the paddock.
Ben Wise: painted signs and banners, put up the banners.
Jay: cut out crepe paper triangles.
Glory-Alice: cut some crepe paper triangles.
Maisie Macduff: knitted tea cosies for sale, rang up her friend whose great-grandson worked for the ABC.
Socko Riley: nothing!

Chapter 4:

- How is Meg the Shetland pony decorated?
A) With red ribbons in her mane.
- What is Maisie Macduff wearing?
A) A souvenir T-shirt, comfy tracksuit pants and her best purple hat, with violets and a mauve veil on it.
- When do the first tourists arrive?
A) After nine o'clock.
- What is the first prize in the competition? Why is Jay worried about it?
A: The first prize is a painting by Ben Wise. Although people in Bungawitta like Ben's paintings, Jay doesn't know whether they would be considered good in the

wider world. He worries that the tourists will ask for their money back because the first prize isn't good enough.

- List some of the sculptures made for the competition.
A) Wombats, kangaroos, turtles, dinosaurs, maps of Australia, cars, crows, swagmen, unicorns, dolphins, crocodiles, Sydney Opera House, giant pineapple.
- What time is the paddock full?
A) 12 o'clock.
- How do we know the young tourist likes the sponge cake he buys from Cookie?
A) Because he tears off the plastic and eats the cake whole.

Chapter 5:

- What is Socko's job at the Festival?
A) He runs the Shetland pony rides.
- Who does Glory-Alice ask to help her? Why this person and not someone else?
A) She asks Maisie Macduff, because everyone else is busy.
- Why are the ABC people late arriving?
A) They took a wrong turn.
- Why are the people of Bungawitta so desperate for the ABC to arrive?
A) The tourists are all expecting to be on TV, and they don't want them to be disappointed in case they ask for their money back.
- Where is Maisie's piano?
A) Outside under the pepper tree, by the big paddock gate.
- Jay hears a cry when he goes to Maisie Macduff's house. What does he think it is?
A) He thinks it's Bruce the cat yawling because he has been shut in the bedroom.

Chapter 6:

- Why have the ABC people been delayed this time?
A) They had a flat tyre.
- Why does Aunty Flo ask Greasy to start the line dance for her?
A) Because her bad knee is sore.
- What surprising thing has Glory-Alice done, and why?
A) With Maisie Macduff's help, she has locked the weatherman in the toilet. She mistakenly believes that he can control the weather, and is trying to make him promise to make it rain.
- Why doesn't Jay let the weatherman out straight away?
A) He doesn't want to let Glory-Alice down.
- What mood is the weatherman in when they let him out?
A) He is extremely angry.

Chapter 7:

- What strange sight does Jay see when he goes outside?
A) He sees all the tourists dancing to Maisie's music (plus the sculptures looking almost alive in the strange light).
- What is the weatherman's real reason for coming to the festival?
A) He has always wanted to work for the ABC, and hoped to do an interview for them.
- What three signs tell Jay it's going to rain?
A) Flo's bad knee hurts, Cookie has a headache and the ants are carrying their eggs.
- What is Glory-Alice's full name? Why does her mother use it?
A) Gloria Alice Doyle. Her mother uses her full name because she is in big trouble for locking the weatherman in the toilet.
- Why does Socko tell the weatherman to shut up?
A) Because the weatherman is being rude about the residents of Bungawitta.
- What is Ben Wise's theory about why the drought has ended?
A) He thinks that, like a spiteful person, the drought was just waiting for the biggest, most inconvenient moment to make it rain: just before the judging, after the tourists have finally finished their dirt sculptures.

Chapter 8:

- Where do the tourists sleep?
A) They sleep in Bungawitta houses, abandoned shops and the post office.
- How do the tourists react to the rain?
A) They are pleased for the people of Bungawitta that it is raining at last.
- Who wins first prize?
A) The girl who sculpted a wombat with leaves in its mouth.
- Jay was worried about whether Ben's painting was a good enough prize. Is it?
A) Yes. The girl loves it, and an art gallery owner says it is superb and offers to buy it. He asks Ben Wise to get in touch (to sell other paintings).
- What happened to the piano? Did Maisie mind? Why?
A) The piano got waterlogged, even under the tarpaulin. Maisie doesn't mind. She says it wasn't much good to start with, and that she would have given it or anything to see the drought end.

CREATIVE ACTIVITIES (AFTER READING THE BOOK)

1. ART & PERFORMANCE

- In *Bungawitta*, Craig Smith's illustrations work together with Emily Rodda's words to tell the story. Have a look in particular at page 78-9. Now it's your turn. Find a part of the story that you like, and use illustration to show what happens. Your picture doesn't have to look like Craig Smith's; it should be in your own style. You could try drawing, painting, or collage.
- Draw a picture of your favourite character from *Bungawitta*.
- Using your illustrations as a base, create puppets and bring a scene from *Bungawitta* to life, in pairs or groups. First you will need to make the puppets. An easy way is to draw your character (fairly big, perhaps the size of an A4 piece of paper), colour it in, and glue it to a piece of strong cardboard. The cardboard should be strong enough to stand up without flopping. Cut out the character shape. Glue or tape a paddle pop stick to the back of the cardboard, at the base, so you can hold your puppet upright. Next, you will need to make a stage. This could be as simple as a desk: students sit underneath the desk, holding the puppets up at desk level and making them speak. Or, if you have a bit of time, and you can find a big enough box, you could create a Punch and Judy style theatre for one or two students to stand inside at a time. There are lots of different sites on the Internet giving instructions on how to cut out and decorate a cardboard box theatre, (for example, some simple instructions at <http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Puppet-Theater-from-a-Box>).
- Create a miniature version of the Bungawitta Earth Sculpture display, using plasticine, clay, polyclay or even papier maché (painted mud colour after it sets!). After agreeing on an average size for the sculptures, each student could create his or her own sculpture. Then the class's work could be displayed in a sand tray.
- Draw a map/plan of Bungawitta, showing all the main places mentioned in the story.
- Make posters to advertise the Bungawitta festival, using paint and/or collage.

2. CREATIVE WRITING

- Imagine that you are one of the tourists who came to Bungawitta to make an earth sculpture. Write a message to one of your friends about your adventure.
- Do you come from the city or the country? Write about the things that are special about the place where you live. Are there disadvantages too?
- Have you been to a very small country town like Bungawitta? Write a description of what happened. What did you see and hear while you were there? If you already live in a small country town, describe a typical day there, as if writing to a friend who has never been there. And finally, if you have never been to a small country town, use your imagination and write a description of your imaginary trip to Bungawitta.
- Imagine you are living through a severe drought, like the people in Bungawitta. Write a poem about how it feels and what it is like. Or perhaps write about what it is like when the rain finally comes. What if you were Glory-Alice, who is seeing rain for the first time? Use your senses to make the poem feel real. What do you see, hear, smell etc? You might choose to make your poem rhyme, or just focus on writing a series of short lines that seem to sound nice together.
- Ben Wise says 'We've been dealing with a big, bad, spiteful old Dry' (p106), as if the drought is a person, or a monster, with its own will. In literature, this technique is called Personification – talking about a thing as if it has human thoughts and feelings. As an experiment, try writing a short version of *Bungawitta* from the drought's point of view. Imagine that you are the 'bad old Dry'. What would a drought look like, if it were a person? What would it say? You'll need to use lots of imagination for this one.
- List your talents, great and small. These might include musical ability, strength, being able to run fast, tell good jokes, reach things on tall shelves (if you are tall), win games of limbo (if you are short). Also list things you are interested in, and things you would like to learn in the future. What might you have contributed if you were helping organise the Bungawitta Earth Sculpture Festival?
- Write a Press Release for the Bungawitta Festival, like Lola Riley did. A press release is a good way of getting publicity. It is a one-page written report about your event, sent to TV stations, radio stations and newspapers. Write MEDIA

RELEASE and the date at the top, then an attention-getting headline, like 'ANNOUNCING THE FANTASTIC BUNGAWITTA EARTH SCULPTURE FESTIVAL'. The report that follows should make the festival sound as exciting as possible, and mention the main attractions, and when and where it takes place. It should have contact phone numbers at the bottom, in case the journalists want more information.

- A few of the citizens of Bungawitta use old Australian slang. For example, Aunty Flo says 'my bung knee gave me curry' (page 6), and Cookie says 'stone the crows' (p24). Do you know any other old Australian slang words and phrases? Ask family and friends to help you make a collection of phrases. Examples: She'll be apples (everything will be fine), a drongo (a stupid person), back of Bourke (far out in the countryside), up a gum tree (in trouble), he's flat out like a lizard drinking (he's very busy). Then write your own story using as many of these expressions correctly as you can.
- **Teacher's Warning Note:** dictionaries of Australian slang on the Internet are useful as reference, but they (of course) contain many extremely vulgar phrases which you may not wish students to see.

3. MUSIC

- Imagine that you had to write a theme song for the Bungawitta Festival. The song would be like an ad for the Festival. Make up your own tune, or use the tune to a song you already know and just change the words.
- Maisie Macduff knows a lot of old Australian songs. What are the two that are mentioned? What are they about? Can you sing them? Do you know any others? What about traditional songs from your own family culture? A) 'Waltzing Matilda', about a swagman who steals a sheep and is pursued by the law, and 'Click Go the Shears', about shearing sheep. Others include 'Flash Jack from Gundagai' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy'.

4. SCIENCE

- Make a simple weather chart and keep it for a month. Divide a piece of cardboard, or a white board, into columns headed **Day**, **Report**, and **Correct?**. If this is done as a class activity, one person could be in charge of each day. Watch the TV weather report, listen on the radio, read it in the paper or check on the Internet (www.bom.gov.au or www.weatherchannel.com.au). In the morning the responsible person gives a short weather report to the class, then puts the correct

symbol (sun, rain/showers) into the **Report** column. Then, the next day a tick or cross is put in the **Correct?** column, depending on whether yesterday's report was right or wrong, and the new report for today is given. At the end of the month, totals can be done to see how many sunny and rainy days there were in the month, and how accurate the official reports were.

- Keep a class record of rainfall. Rain gauges can be bought at shops like Australian Geographic, and there are many sets of instructions for making home-made rain gauges on the Internet (Google 'how to make a rain gauge')
- Why is it important to predict the weather? What sorts of things do weather forecasters look at? (HINT: This episode from the ABC program *Behind the News* might be helpful <http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s2488893.htm>, or just do a search for 'weather' at <http://www.abc.net.au/btn>)

5. **DISCUSSION TOPICS and CLASS PROJECTS**

- **WATER CHALLENGE:** We all know the importance of using water carefully. What if the only water you had was one tankful, and there was a drought? What would you keep your precious water for, other than drinking? What rules would you follow so it lasted as long as possible?
- **CITY AND COUNTRY:** As a class, brainstorm and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of city life versus country life.
- **IMAGINE YOUR OWN FESTIVAL:** A festival gathers lots of people together for a certain purpose. The people of Bungawitta decided to try to attract tourists by having a festival with a sculpture theme. In groups, or as a class, think of an idea for a theme festival your school or class could have, on a very small budget and taking your local area and talents into account. Some ideas could be Flower Festival, Hat Festival, Teddy Bear Festival, Music Festival, Art Festival, Computer game festival, Rainbow Festival (where everyone wears bright colours and there's a prize for the most colourful outfit), Fancy Dress Festival (general or something specific like fantasy, superheroes, 1970s, space, fairytales).
 - Think of a slogan for your festival. Make posters advertising it.
 - What sort of food would you sell? What other things would you sell?
 - Where would you put the tables? Draw a map of the festival site.
 - Would you have music? What sort?

- **TIME MANAGEMENT:** The people of Bungawitta had six weeks to organise their festival ... that's not long, considering everything that has to be done to organise a big event. Using the information given in the story to help you, write a list of all the things they had to do in this time. Then, arrange the list in order—starting with what should be done first (like ordering the portable toilets, for example, to make sure they are booked) and what should be done at the last minute (like filling the eskies with ice, putting out the food for sale on tables, for example).
- **MONEY:** At 10:30am on Festival Day, Lola says they 'break even', and that anything else is 'profit'. Do you know what this means in money terms?
A) When people sell things, they often have to spend some money first setting things up (e.g. buying stock to sell, or in the case of the festival, paying for all the things they need to make the festival run). Then, when the visitors buy tickets and products, it pays back the money that has been spent. To 'break even' means that the money spent is equal to the money earned back. To 'make a profit' means that the money earned is greater than the money spent – i.e. the event has been a great success!
- **BUDGETING (for older students):** The people of Bungawitta make a profit on the festival, by earning more from ticket sales and food sales than they spent on organising the festival. Imagine that you are running a cake stall at a market or festival, and work out the following:
 - 1) The ingredients for the cakes cost you \$50. Plastic wrap, paper plates and cardboard for signs cost you \$10. You hire a table for \$20. What are your initial total costs? A) \$80
 - 2) You make ten cakes. Each cake is cut into eight slices. How many slices do you have? What price per slice will allow you to break even, if you sell all the cake? A) 80, \$1
 - 3) Now, what would happen if you raised the price of your cake? If your cake was \$2 per slice, how much profit would you make, if you sold all the cake? A) \$160 sales - \$80 initial costs = \$80 profit
 - 4) To make a bigger profit, you could of course raise the price of your cake. Or, you could reduce your initial costs. How might you do that? A) Borrow a table instead of hiring one, use recycled cardboard for signs instead of buying it new, make a simpler cake without any fancy expensive ingredients, ask for ingredients to be donated, etc.

- 5) The calculations depend upon selling all the cake. What are some ideas you might try to entice lots of people at the market to buy it? Remember you can't force anyone, and you can't tell lies about your cake (i.e. it gives you magical powers when it doesn't, etc.)

FURTHER DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

- Do you have a relative who likes cooking? See if you can get them to teach you how to bake desserts like sponge cake, Anzac biscuits, lamingtons, chocolate slice, scones, and fruit cake.
- When it's about to rain, Cookie gets a headache and Aunty Flo's bad leg aches. This isn't uncommon. Do you know, or have you heard of, anyone else who can predict rain or storms because of how they feel? It might even be your pet: some dogs get anxious before storms and rain.
- What is a rain dance?
- What is the ABC? How is it different to other TV or radio stations in Australia?
- Aunty Flo has a belief that she can make it rain. She says, among other things, that she has deliberately not fixed her leaky roof. The idea is that since it often seems to rain at inconvenient moments in our lives, her deliberate inconvenient act will trick the rain into falling. Emily Rodda won't like me saying this, but I happen to know that when her family want it to rain, they do what Aunty Flo does. Emily waters the garden. Her husband Bob the builder leaves the car windows down. Her friend Ruth buys a watermelon, and swears it never fails. Whether these things actually work or not is beside the point ... it's fun! Does anyone you know have methods that they believe help control the weather?
- Students may also be interested in their own screen-printing project, if your school has the necessary equipment. They can draw their own simple design, cut out a stencil and bring in a T-shirt to print on. (Google 'how to screen print T-shirts')
- If you liked *Bungawitta*, write and tell Emily Rodda why. Or if someone in your class comes up with a question about the book that no one can answer, write and ask her about it! Don't forget to include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your reply. You can address your letter to either of the following addresses:

Emily Rodda c/- Scholastic Australia, PO Box 579, Gosford NSW 2250

Emily Rodda c/- Omnibus Books, 335 Unley Rd, Malvern SA 5061

FURTHER READING

Emily Rodda has written several other funny stories based in Australia like *Bungawitta*. You might like to read *Bob the Builder and the Elves*, *Green Fingers*, and *Dog Tales*. Your school librarian will have further suggestions.

WEBSITES

Here are some starter sites for topics mentioned, if you want to use the Internet. Some of these are quite advanced, and students will require some guidance:

ABC TV and Radio

<http://www.abc.net.au>

History of the ABC

<http://www.abc.net.au/corp/history/75years/timeline/>

Wikipedia—ABC TV (contains links to many online articles)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ABC_Television

ABC Science

<http://www.abc.net.au/science>

ABC Environment

<http://www.abc.net.au/environment>

Bureau of Meteorology

<http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/livedrought.shtml>

Tourism Australia

<http://www.tourism-australia.net.au/australia-drought/>

Behind the News (ABC program)

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn>

Urban Ecology Australia

<http://www.urbanecology.org.au>

Science News for Kids website (based in Washington D.C., USA)

<http://www.sciencenewsforkids.org/articles/20040825/Feature1.asp>

EMILY RODDA

For information about Emily Rodda, including answers to frequently asked questions and a current booklist, please go to:

<http://www.emilyrodde.com> and

<http://www.scholastic.com.au>