



SQUATTERS



CARMEL REILLY



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Colonial words

When a word is printed in **bold**, look for its meaning in the 'Colonial words' box.

Colonial people: Squatters

Would you like to travel back to colonial times and experience what life was like then? In this book, you will meet Sarah. She lives with her family in Queensland in the 1860s. Come along and see through her eyes what the life of a squatter was like.

What is a squatter?

Squatters were settlers who started moving into the bush in the 1820s and 1830s. They claimed vacant land to set up large farms called stations. Most squatters made their fortune from farming sheep for wool. This was Australia's biggest **export** at the time.

AUSTRALIA'S COLONIAL PERIOD

The colonial period began in 1788, when British settlers established a **colony** in New South Wales. It ended when Australia became a **nation** in 1901.

Colonial words

COLONY a settlement in Australia that was controlled by the British government

EXPORT a product sold to another country

NATION a country with its own government



A photographer came to the station to take our family portrait.



*Hello, my name is Sarah. I am twelve years old. My family came from Scotland to New South Wales in 1839. Papa bought 2000 sheep in Sydney town and a **dray**-load of farm equipment. He travelled north with the sheep until he found land to build a station. We joined Papa a few months later.*

At first, station life was extremely hard and lonely for Mama, but when Papa made more money and hired more workers, life became easier. Now Mama runs the house with a cook and two maids. My brothers, sisters and I spend almost all our time on the station. We even have a governess to give us lessons, although next year I will go to boarding school.

Colonial words

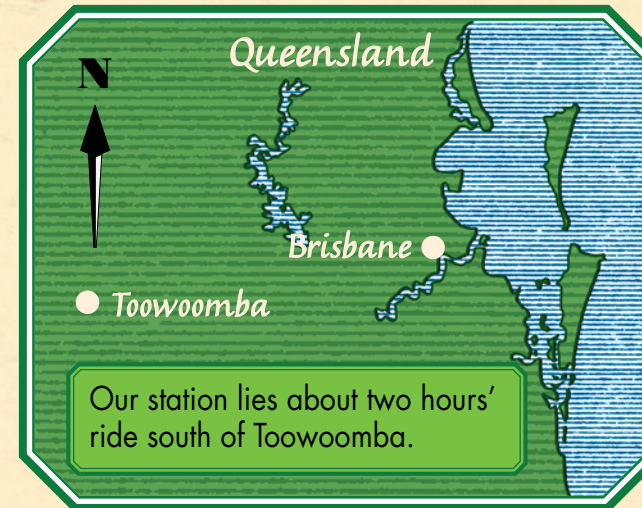
DRAY a cart pulled by horses or bullocks

Welcome to our sheep station

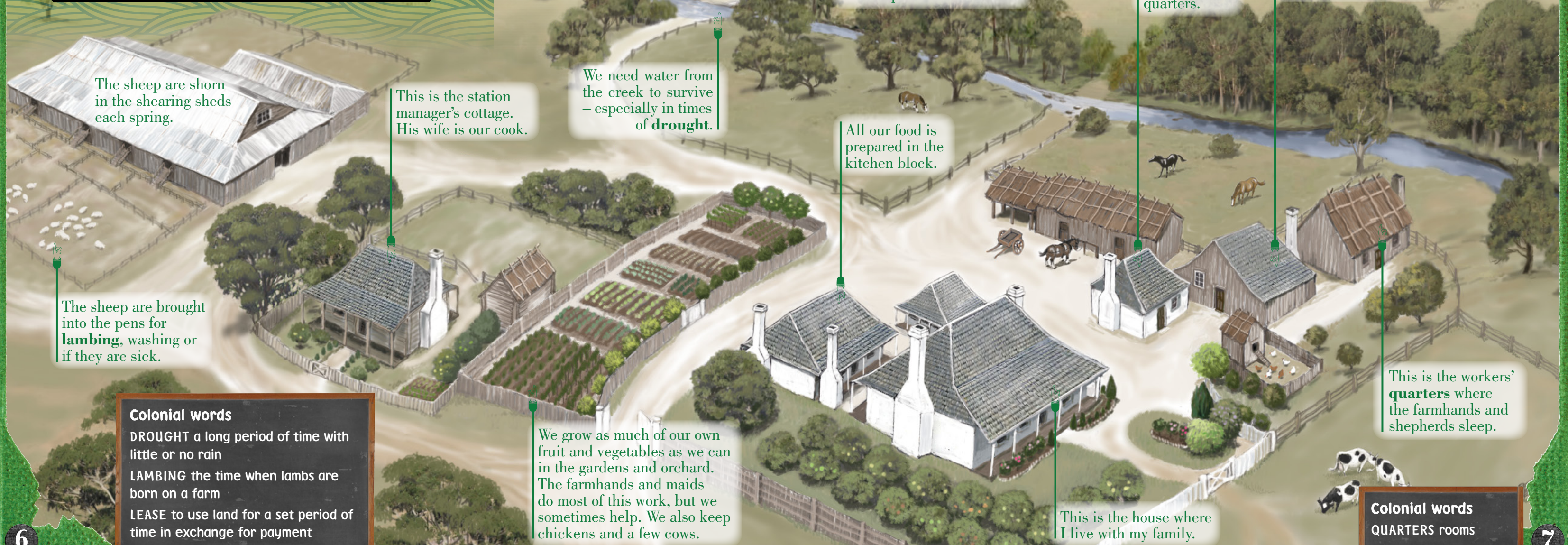
Our station stretches as far as the eye can see. Papa says it's almost twice as big as Sydney Harbour! We run 3000 sheep and employ at least 20 people to help with the work. We do not own all the land, but **lease** some of it from the government.

Home sweet home

When Papa first came here, he cleared the land of trees and scrub and built a house, sheds and fences. The first house he built is now our kitchen block. When Papa made more money, he had a new house built and this is where we live now.



The shearers work hard inside the shearing shed.



The sheep are shorn in the shearing sheds each spring.

This is the station manager's cottage. His wife is our cook.

We need water from the creek to survive – especially in times of **drought**.

All our food is prepared in the kitchen block.

The governess has her own quarters.

This is the shed where the maids sleep.

The sheep are brought into the pens for **lambing**, washing or if they are sick.

Colonial words

- DROUGHT** a long period of time with little or no rain
- LAMBING** the time when lambs are born on a farm
- LEASE** to use land for a set period of time in exchange for payment

We grow as much of our own fruit and vegetables as we can in the gardens and orchard. The farmhands and maids do most of this work, but we sometimes help. We also keep chickens and a few cows.

This is the house where I live with my family.

This is the workers' **quarters** where the farmhands and shepherds sleep.

Colonial words
QUARTERS rooms

Where we live

Our family spends most of its time in and around the house. It is not as big as some squatters' houses that I have seen, but it is very comfortable compared with the homes of most of our closest neighbours. The house has a wide wooden verandah at the front and back to keep out the hot summer sun.

Most days we wash with a jug of water and basin in our rooms, but once a week we take a proper bath. The maid fetches the water and heats half of it on the stove in the kitchen, then she fills the metal tub in the bathroom.

The girls' bedroom has a bed, a wardrobe, a chest of drawers, a small chair and a rug on the floor.

Our drawing room

Our family relaxes in the drawing room, which is also called the living room. It is a large, airy room with big windows that let in a lot of light. There is a fireplace to keep us warm, and gas lamps give us light in the evening.

Our drawing room, which looks similar to this, contains furniture that my parents brought from Scotland.

We eat our meals in the dining room.

Papa runs the station from his office.

All the rooms are arranged around a large central hallway.

We study on a large table in the middle of the schoolroom.



What we eat

When Papa first arrived, he had to bring basic supplies such as flour, tea and sugar with him. For the first few months, he ate **damper**, **mutton** and any native animals that he shot. Now, thanks to Mama's garden, our animals and the stores in the nearby town of Toowoomba, we have all sorts of good food to eat.

Food from the station

Mama planted fruit trees and a kitchen garden and bought cows and chickens when we arrived at the station. This gives us fruit, vegetables, milk and eggs. We have mutton, or sometimes kangaroo and wallaby, for our dinner.

Colonial words
DAMPER a kind of bread made without yeast
MUTTON meat from sheep

Food from town

Every month, the station manager goes into town to get basic supplies and any other items on the shopping list. We need enough food to feed our family and the workers too.

A COLONIAL SHOPPING LIST

A squatter's shopping list might have included items such as flour, tea, sugar, salt, molasses, ham, bacon, pork, beef, tinned sardines, cheese, pickles, coffee, rice, spices, cracker biscuits and dried beans, and fruit and nuts.

MAKE THIS COLONIAL FOOD! SCONES

Scones were a popular colonial food. They are easy to make and delicious to eat. Ask an adult to help you with the cooking.

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups self-raising flour
- 2 tablespoons butter in small pieces
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¾ cup milk
- jam
- whipped cream

EQUIPMENT

- a bowl
- a rolling pin
- a board
- a cup
- a tablespoon
- a teaspoon
- a knife
- a baking tray
- a sieve

METHOD



1

Pre-heat the oven. Sift the flour into a bowl and add the salt. Rub the butter into the flour until the mix looks like breadcrumbs.



2

Add the milk and mix with your hands until the dough is firm.



3

Roll, or press, the dough on a floured board until it is about two centimetres thick.



4

Cut into squares and bake on a cold tray for between 12 and 15 minutes at 180°C, until golden on top. Serve with jam and whipped cream.

What we wear

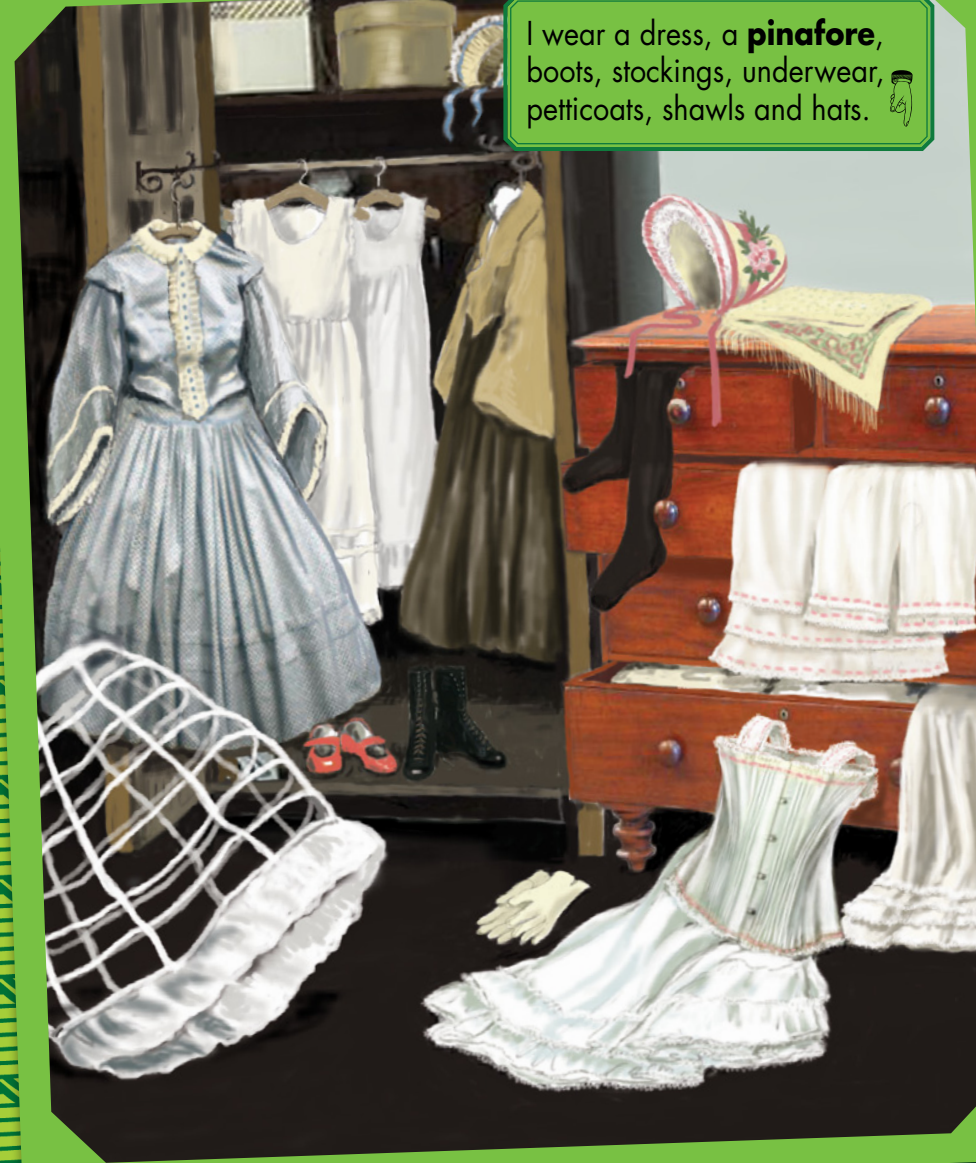
As station owners, it is important that our family always looks its best, but even squatters do not have many clothes. They are expensive to make and expected to last.

Men's clothes

Most of Papa's clothes, including his suits, are made by a tailor. Mama makes some of his clothes and my sisters knit his socks. My brothers go with Papa to the tailor to have their best clothes made. Mama and my sisters mend all our clothes by hand.



This is an outfit like the one Papa wore when the photographer came to take our family portraits.



I wear a dress, a **pinafore**, boots, stockings, underwear, petticoats, shawls and hats.

Women's clothes

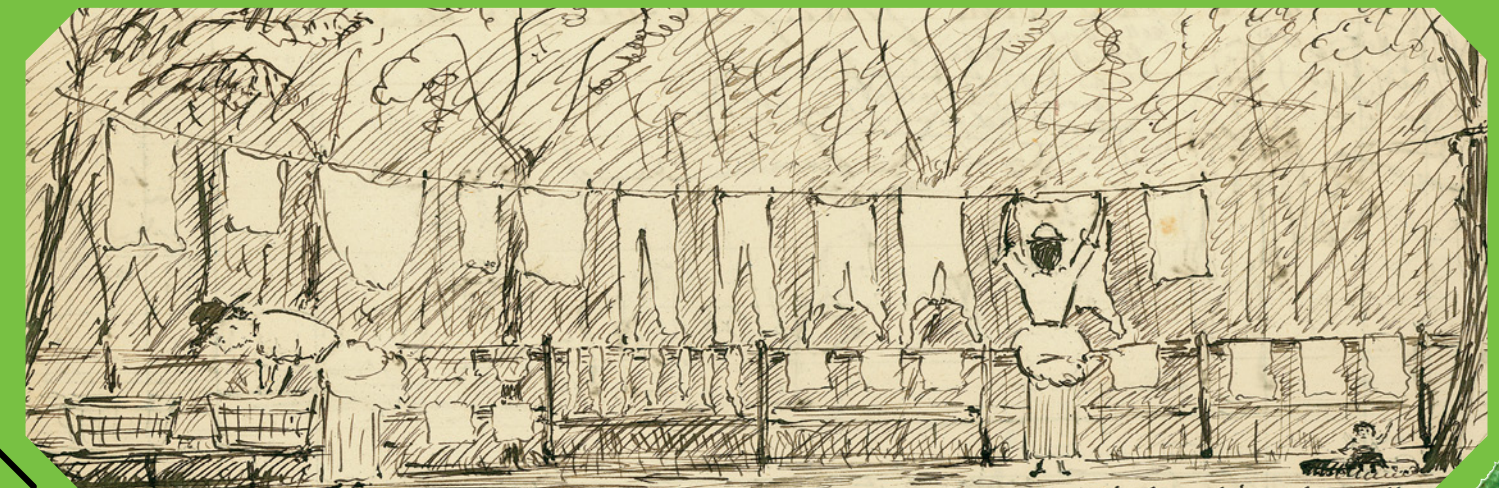
Mama, my sisters and I get one or two new dresses each season. Mama has dresses and hats made by a dressmaker and **milliner** in Brisbane town. Sometimes her sisters send her dresses from Scotland, but she must alter them so they fit her properly. We wear our old dresses most days and keep the new dresses for special occasions, such as visiting neighbours, going to town or attending church.

ABOUT SQUATTERS' CLOTHES

During the colonial period, people wore their clothes for days at a time. They wore aprons while doing housework or gardening to keep their clothes clean.



Many women wore removable cuffs and collars on their dresses, which could be changed and washed.



Clothes were washed just once a week. It took the maids all day to do the household washing.

Old and worn clothes were made into children's garments, passed on to servants or used as rags.

Colonial words
MILLINER hat maker
PINAFORE apron

How we get the work done

When Papa first arrived, he worked hard to set up the station. When he began to make money, he was able to employ other people to do most of the work on the station. Today, like most squatters, Papa does not do much **manual labour** at all. He manages the station from his office in the house.

Outdoor workers

The station manager oversees all the outdoor workers such as the farmhands and shepherds.

Farmhands do odd jobs and repairs around the farm. They round up the sheep and treat their illnesses. They help the shepherds to prepare the sheep for shearing.

Indoor workers

The maids do all the housework and laundry, and help the cook.

The station manager often works with the farmhands to build, repair and help with tasks around the station. He buys the farm supplies, such as timber and tools.

Many of the farmhands are **ex-convicts**.

Shepherds keep track of the sheep, check them for illness and injury, look after them during lambing, and protect them from dingos.

Colonial words

EX-CONVICTS people who have finished serving prison sentences for committing crimes

MANUAL LABOUR physical work



The maids mainly do indoor work but they also tend the gardens, feed the chickens and milk the cows.



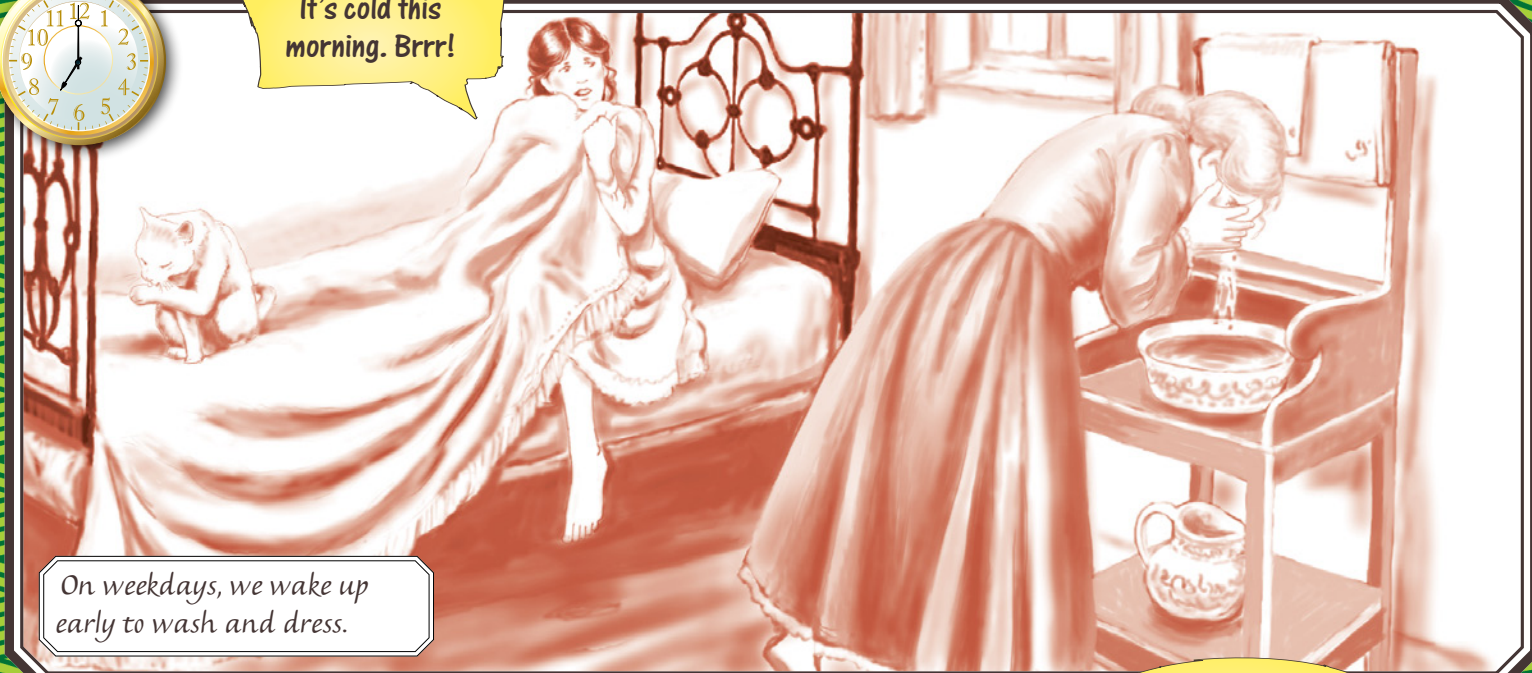
ABORIGINAL WORKERS

Some squatter families employed local indigenous men to work as shepherds and farmhands. Indigenous women also worked as maids. Many of these workers became valued employees.

A working day

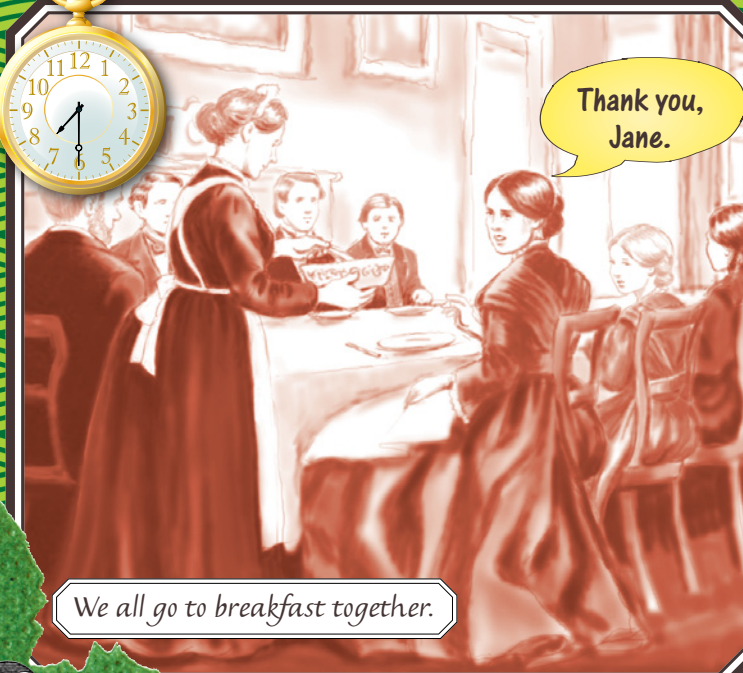
On weekdays, my brothers, sisters and I have lessons with the governess while Papa manages the station and Mama attends to the house.

It's cold this morning. Brrr!



On weekdays, we wake up early to wash and dress.

Thank you, Jane.



We all go to breakfast together.

Make sure you clean the fireplace properly before you start the dusting.

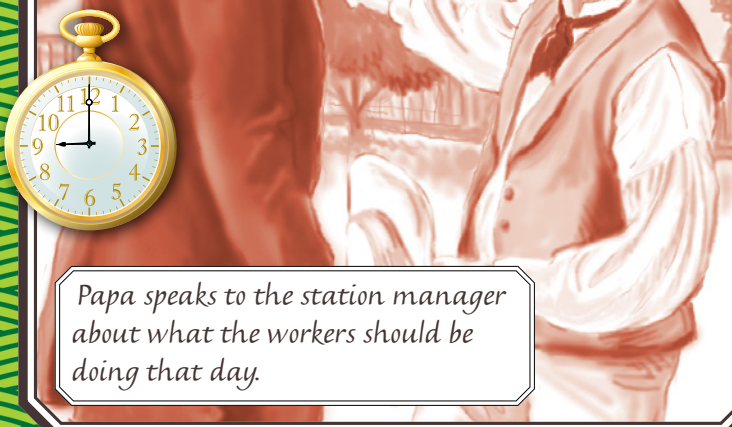
Yes, ma'am.



Then we each go about our day. Mama supervises the cook and the maids.

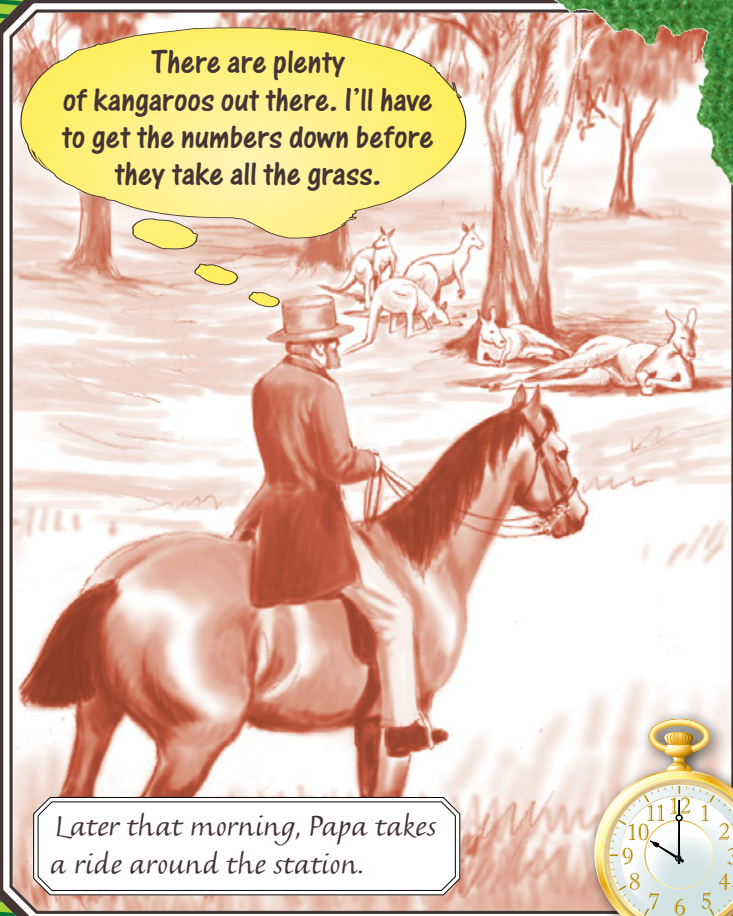
I noticed that the fence behind the sheds needs some repairs.

Yes, sir. I've also asked the men to move some of the sheep to the far paddocks.



Papa speaks to the station manager about what the workers should be doing that day.

There are plenty of kangaroos out there. I'll have to get the numbers down before they take all the grass.



Later that morning, Papa takes a ride around the station.

My brothers, sisters and I have our lessons with the governess.

This morning we will practise our writing, and then we will read about ancient Greece.

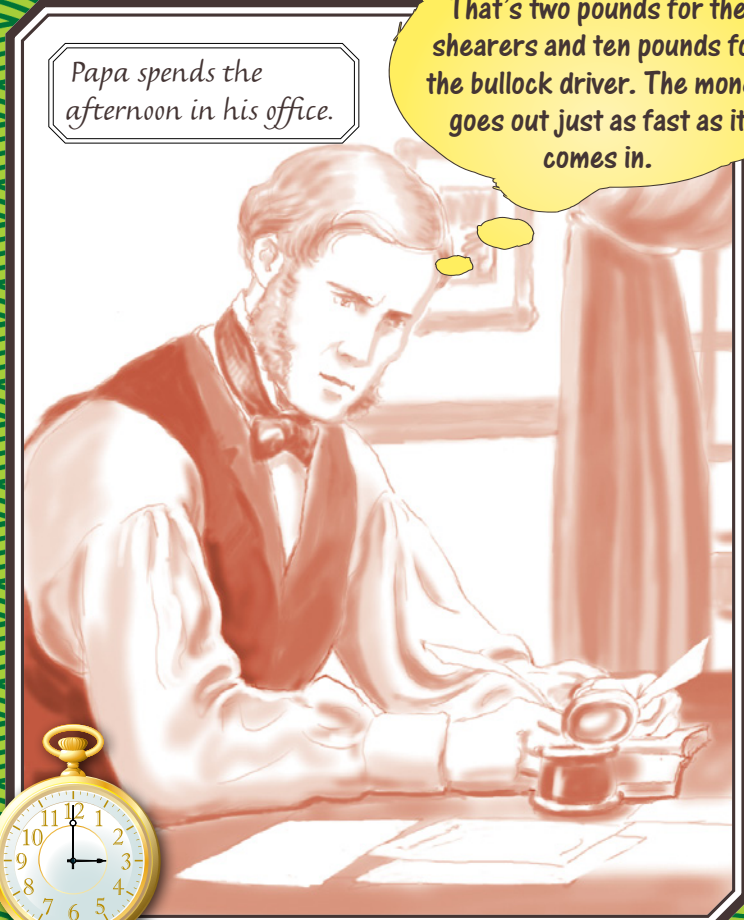
Can we learn about ancient Rome too?



After lunch, Mama cuts flowers from the garden.

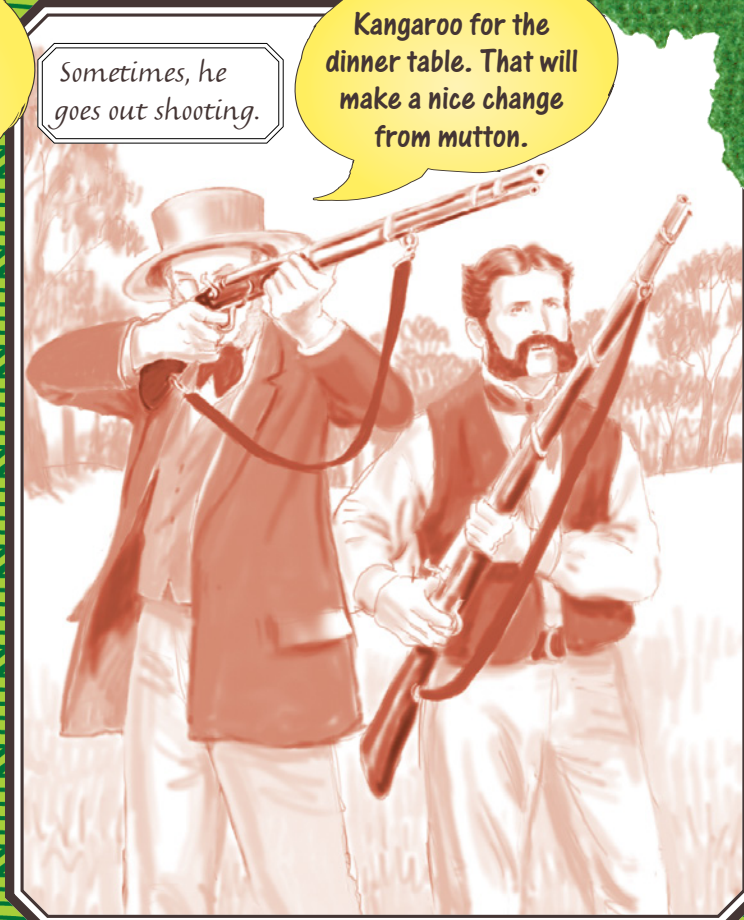


Papa spends the afternoon in his office.



That's two pounds for the shearers and ten pounds for the bullock driver. The money goes out just as fast as it comes in.

Sometimes, he goes out shooting.



Kangaroo for the dinner table. That will make a nice change from mutton.

The roses are beautiful at this time of year.

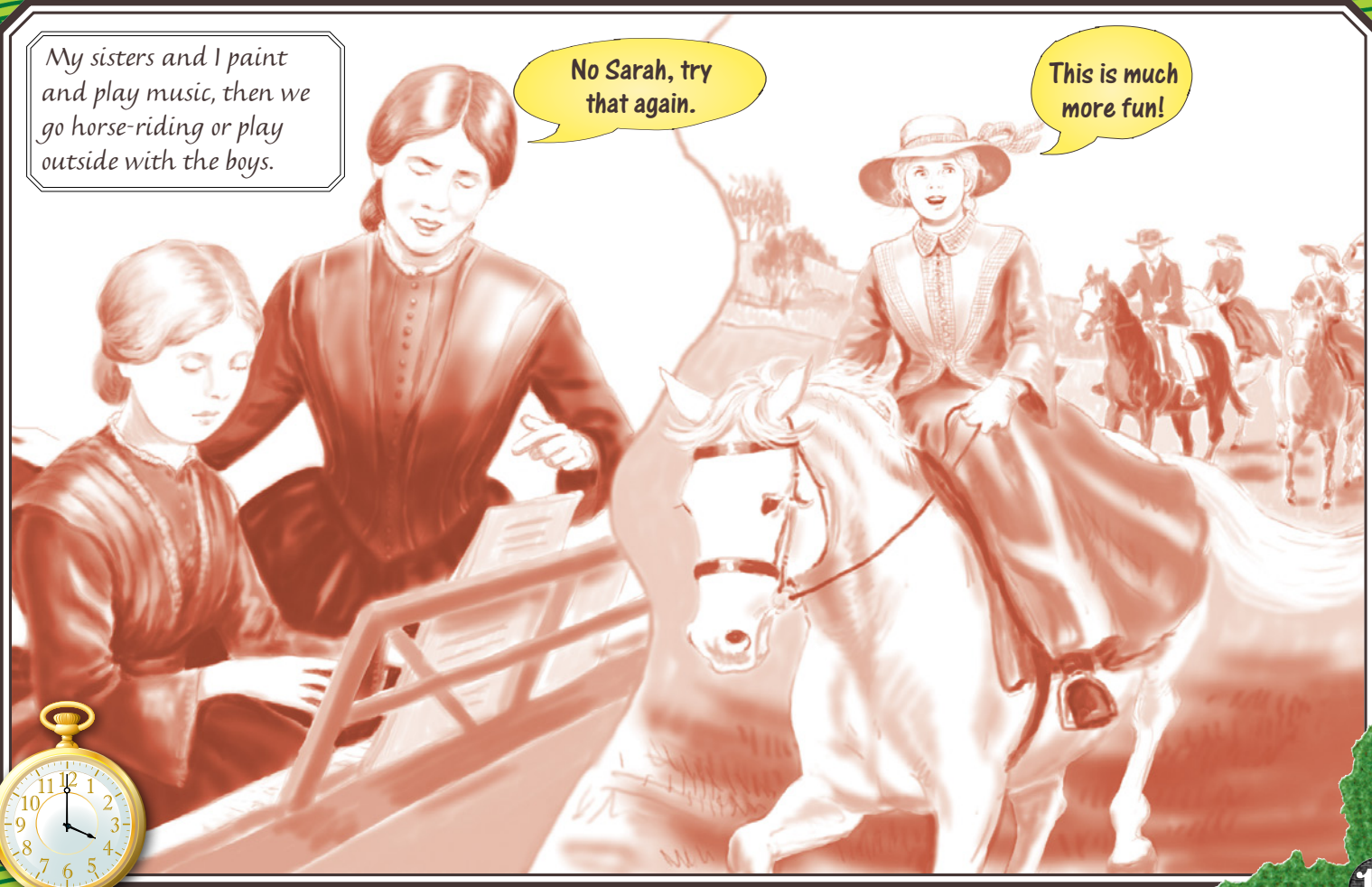


She arranges the flowers for the house.

Later, Mama spends some time reading.



My sisters and I paint and play music, then we go horse-riding or play outside with the boys.



No Sarah, try that again.

This is much more fun!



Leisure and entertainment

We all enjoy time off from work and study. Sometimes, a neighbour might hold a dinner or social evening. Most of our neighbours live far away, so we stay overnight if the journey is long. Travelling in the evening can be dangerous as the roads are bad and there might be bushrangers about.

A day of rest

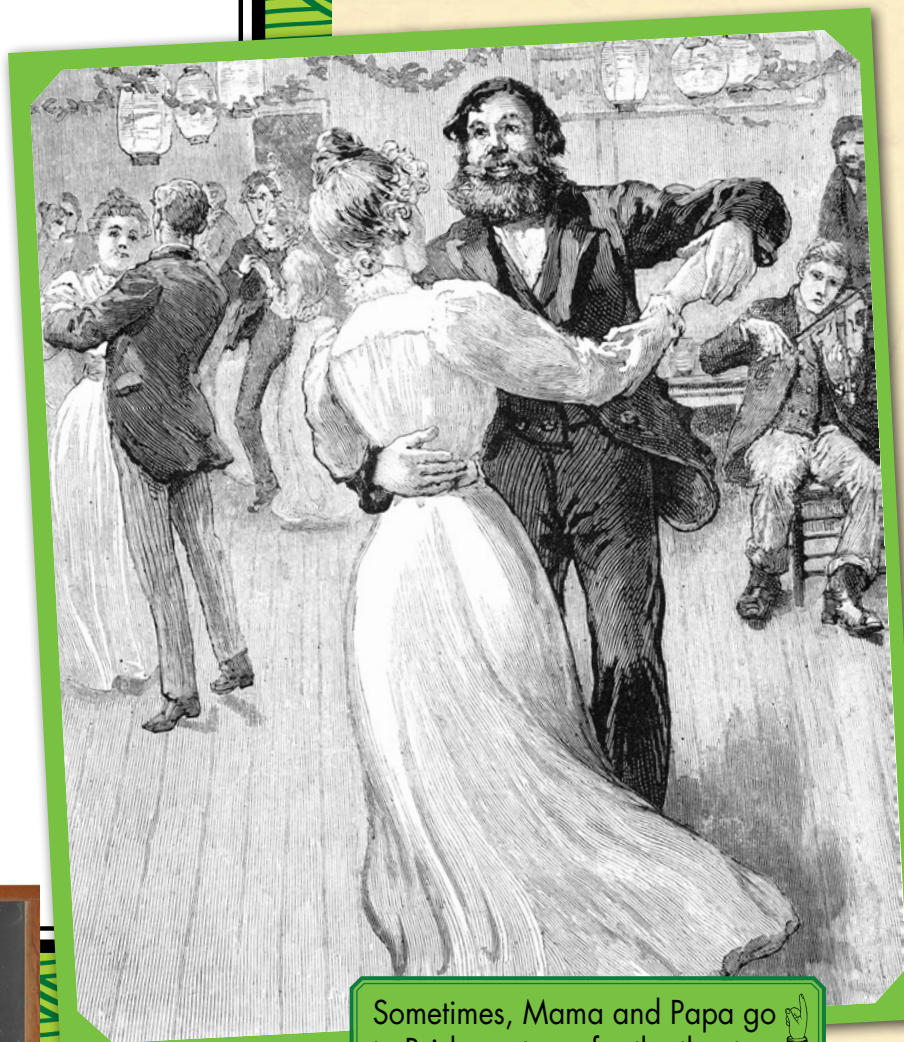
On Sundays, Papa leads prayers and reads bible stories in the morning. Every few months, a travelling minister conducts a church service here on the station, but sometimes we go to the church in Toowoomba. After lunch, we stroll or ride around the gardens or paint, read and play games, such as hopscotch or cricket. Sometimes, we go to a neighbour's home for lunch, or a visitor may come to our house.

Colonial words

BALL a formal social gathering with music and dancing
BUSHRANGERS robbers who lived in the bush during the colonial period

In the evenings

After a busy day, Papa likes to read. My brothers play cards or checkers and I play the piano and sing. Mama and my sisters always have sewing and needlework to do. One of our favourite pastimes is making a puppet theatre and cutting out paper puppets.



Sometimes, Mama and Papa go to Brisbane town for the theatre or a **ball** such as this one.

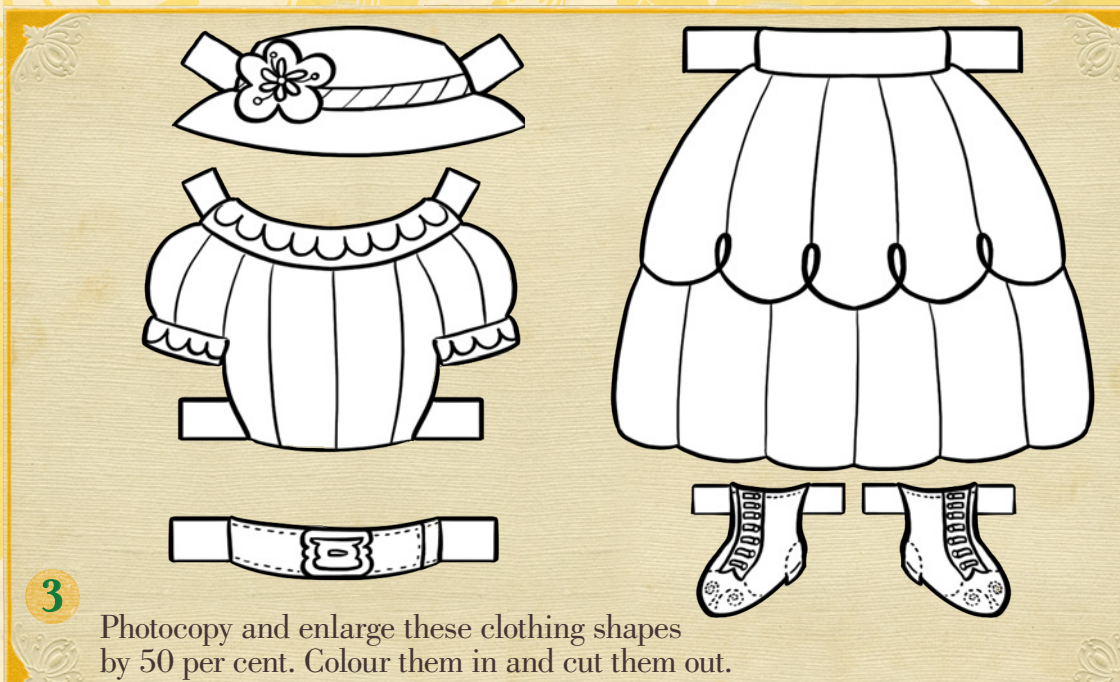
MAKE THIS PAPER PUPPETS

Making paper puppets was a popular pastime in the 1800s. Colonial children used tiny drops of beeswax, instead of glue, to stick clothes onto their puppets.

EQUIPMENT

- photocopier
- pencil
- cardboard
- coloured pencils
- safety scissors
- paper
- glue

METHOD



A trip to town

It's always exciting to leave the station. I wrote a letter to Uncle Billy, who lives down in Victoria, about our recent trip to Toowoomba, the closest town.

May 1862

Dear Uncle Billy,

Yesterday we went to town. What an adventure! We set off in the spring cart along the bumpy track. It took two hours to get there.

Toowoomba grows bigger every day. There is a large sawmill, a hotel, a general store, a blacksmith, a butcher's shop and a place that sells farm tools and supplies. A church has been built and a **telegraph** line has been put in, but there is no railway yet. Papa complains frequently about this.

Colonial words
TELEGRAPH a message transferred along a wire



Toowoomba has a post office too.



Many of our workers travel up from the south.

THE ARGUS

MELBOURNE, FRIDAY JUNE 6TH, 1862

WANTED FARMHANDS, hard workers, good references. Apply J.K, office of this paper

The station manager came along with us to buy food. Mama took us to the general store where she bought some fabric, candied fruit and boiled lollies for us.

Papa bought a newspaper and opened it straight away to check that his advertisement for farmhands had been printed. He scanned the columns until he found it.

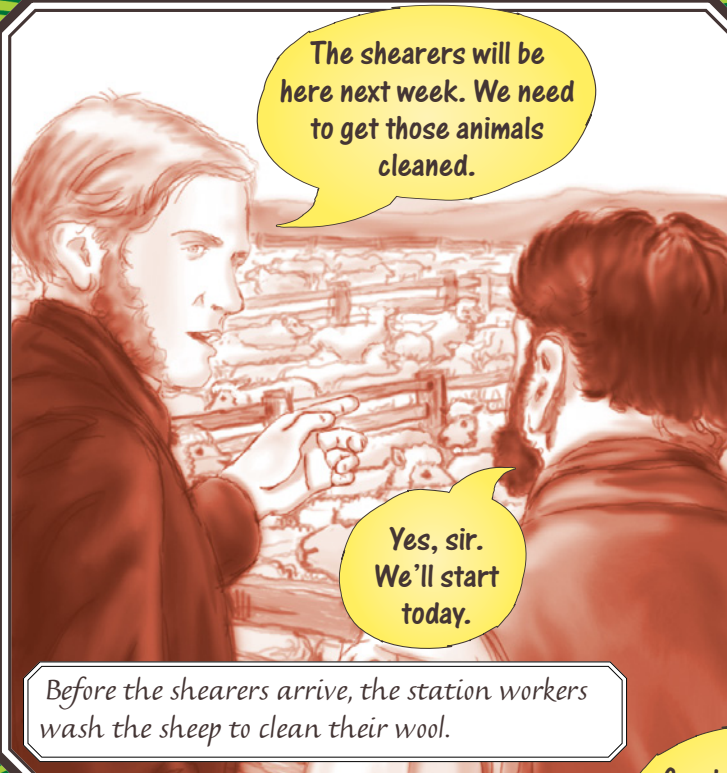
At the post office, a large parcel was waiting for us from Grandmama and Grandpapa in Scotland. It contained a beautiful cloak for Mama, some sheet music for me, a silk necktie for Papa and a toy for each of the children. Mine was a yellow and green spinning top.

I hope this letter finds you well. We cannot wait for your next visit.

Your niece,
Sarah

A big event: Shearing

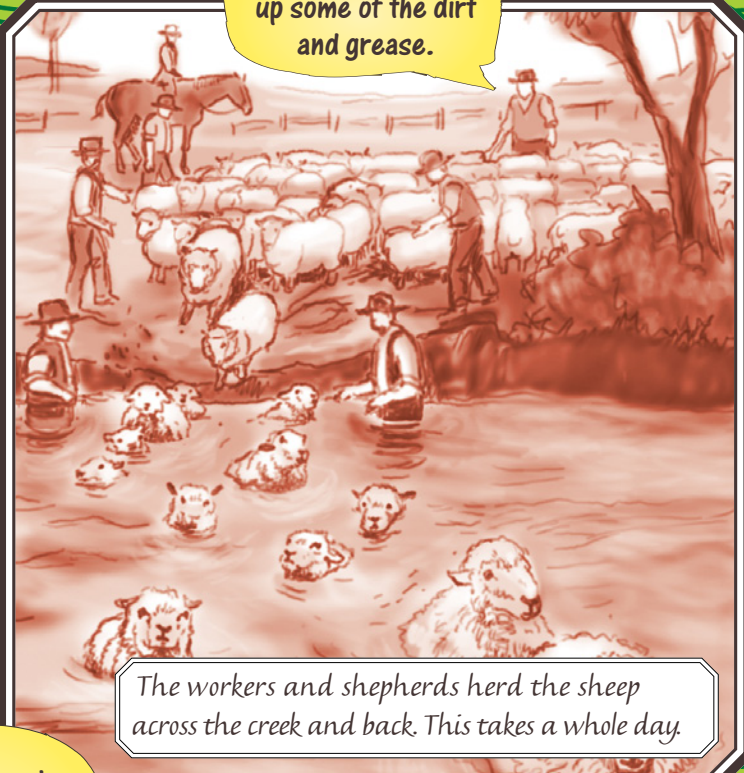
Squatters make their living from selling wool, so sheep-shearing time is the most important event of the year on our station. Papa hires shearers to shear the sheep and pack up their wool, ready for sale.



The shearers will be here next week. We need to get those animals cleaned.

Yes, sir. We'll start today.

Before the shearers arrive, the station workers wash the sheep to clean their wool.



That should loosen up some of the dirt and grease.

The workers and shepherds herd the sheep across the creek and back. This takes a whole day.



The men can get through about 500 sheep a day like this.

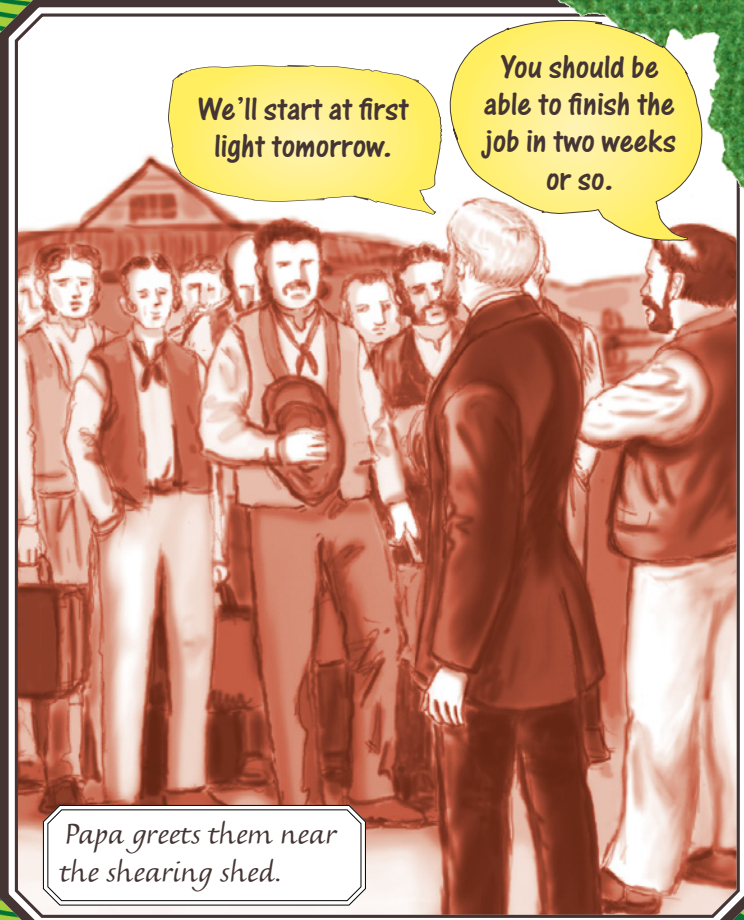
The next day, the sheep are pushed through a long, water-filled **race**, one by one.

Good, at least half the sheep will be ready when the shearers arrive.

Colonial words
RACE a single-file walkway for sheep



Finally, the shearers arrive at the station.



We'll start at first light tomorrow.

You should be able to finish the job in two weeks or so.

Papa greets them near the shearing shed.



The shearers set up camp.



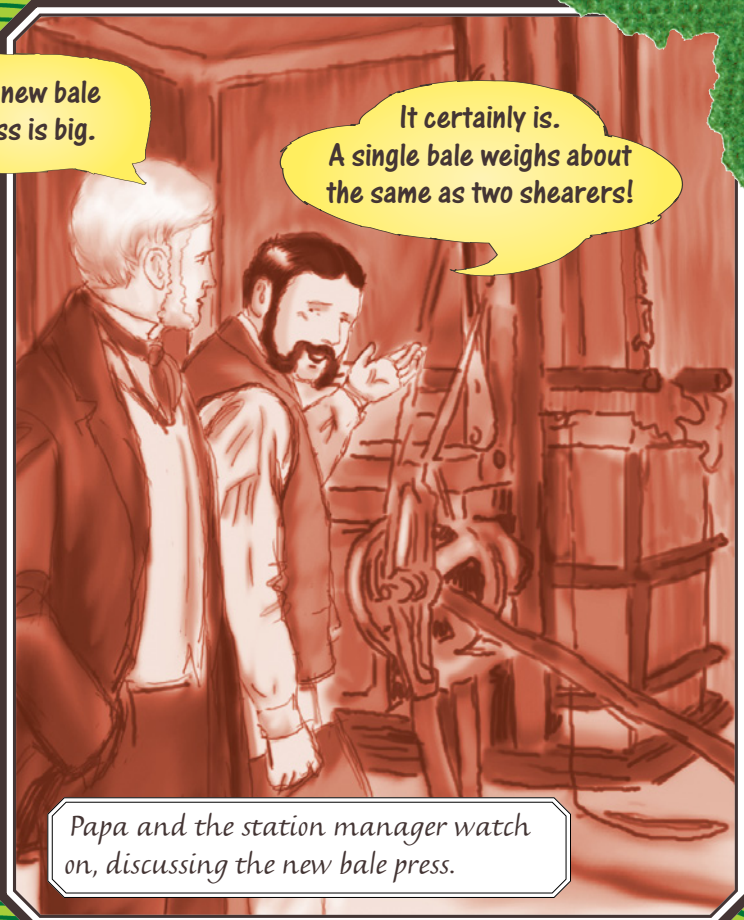


Settle down!

The shearers work hard all day, shearing up to 100 sheep each.



The workers press the fleece into **bales**.



The new bale press is big.

It certainly is. A single bale weighs about the same as two shearers!

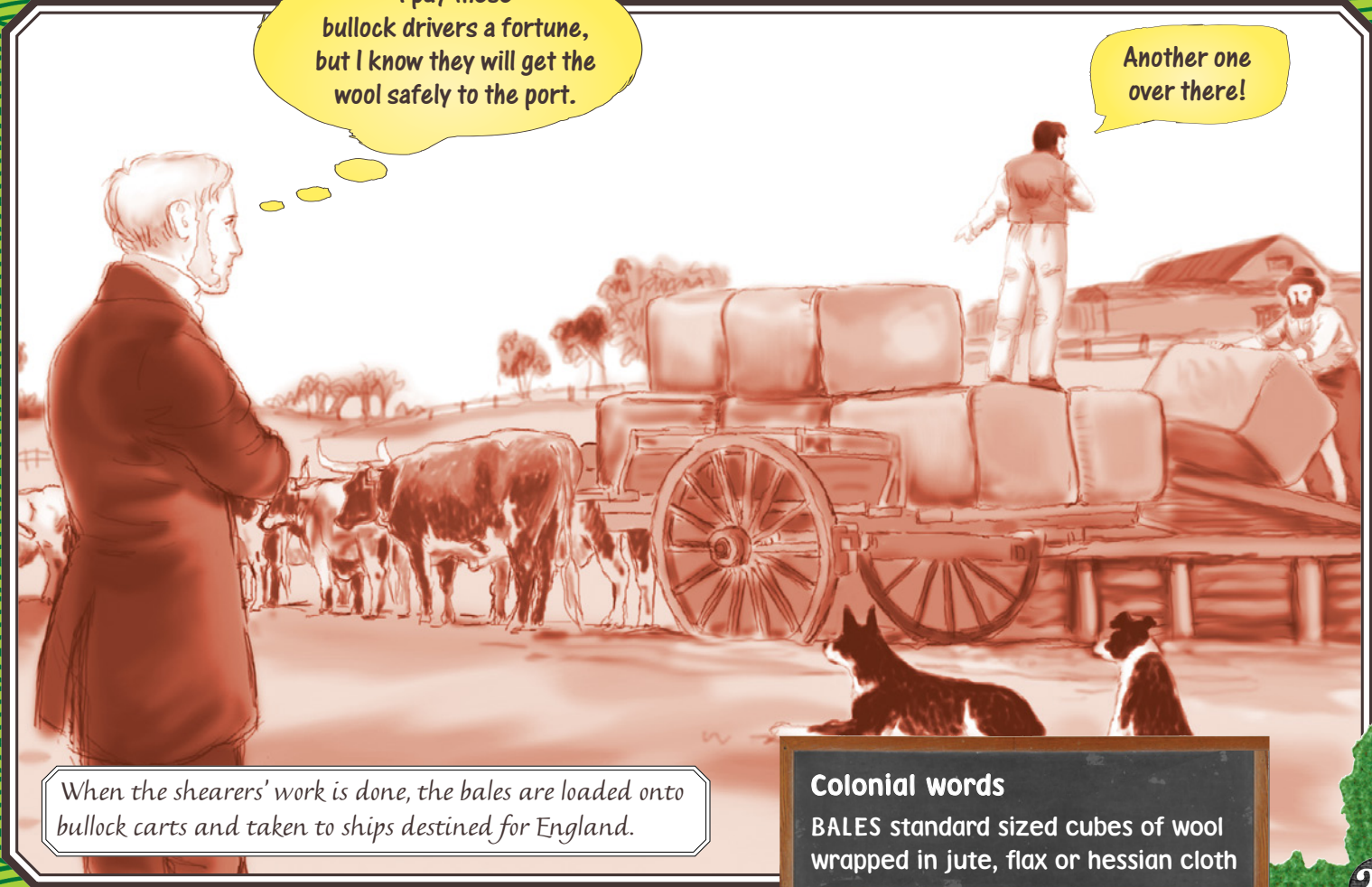
Papa and the station manager watch on, discussing the new bale press.



They take the fleece off the sheep with the shears.



The farmhands scoop up the fleece, checking for dirt and grass seeds.



I pay these bullock drivers a fortune, but I know they will get the wool safely to the port.

Another one over there!

When the shearers' work is done, the bales are loaded onto bullock carts and taken to ships destined for England.

Colonial words
BALES standard sized cubes of wool wrapped in jute, flax or hessian cloth

Meet the real squatters

The story you have just read about Sarah and her family paints a picture of what life would have been like as a squatter during Australia's colonial period. It was created from historical information found in libraries, museums and on the internet about real squatters who lived during the 1860s and 1870s.

The letters of Rachel Henning

Rachel Henning was part of a family who came to Australia from England in the 1850s. She lived for many years on her brother's sheep station in southern Queensland. During this period, Rachel wrote hundreds of letters, which give us a very lively account of the life of colonial squatters.

This is a portrait of Rachel Henning. She wrote many letters to her sister, Etta, in England.



15 October 1863

You have no idea of the trouble to get a dress here. I told you I remade my black silk. The winter dress Emily sent me did not fit in the least ... while one of the two print dresses she sent me up, I made up entirely again.

26 November 1863

Shearing has begun - the great event of the sheep station year ... Everybody is busy now ... besides the shearers there are eight men employed in the wash pool; they are shorthanded there and even John, the cook, is pressed into service.

Exploring the squatter experience

We can learn a lot about squatters and their lives from paintings, photographs, newspaper articles and advertisements of the time.

Paintings and photographs

Paintings and photographs can show us what squatters wore, what their houses and gardens were like, how they worked and what they did in their leisure time.

This photograph shows outbuildings on a station.



These paintings show a family of squatters and a station.



Newspaper articles and advertisements

Newspaper articles and advertisements provide us with information about daily life and important events in squatters' communities during the colonial period.

In Sarah's letter to Uncle Billy, she writes about a new church in Toowoomba.

DARLING DOWNS GAZETTE, 26 JANUARY 1860

THE MORETON BAY COURIER

22 NOVEMBER 1860

MODES DE PARIS

MRS. POOLE begs to intimate to the Ladies of Brisbane and vicinity that she has opened a Dress-making and Millinery Establishment. From Madame Ponders, Court Milliner, Sydney, by whom she is to be supplied regularly with the newest and best Paris Millinery, also the newest style of Dresses. Queen Street, Brisbane, next door to Mr Drew's Chemist.

The *Moreton Bay Courier* advertised the kind of dressmaker that Sarah's mother would have visited to have dresses and hats made for herself and her daughters.

NEW CHURCH AT TOOWOOMBA

On Sunday, the 22nd ... the new Church ... built upon the piece of ground presented ... by James Taylor, Esq., was opened for divine service. The Rev. Mr. Waraker ... purposes officiating regularly in the new church.

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