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Juvenile Fiction

Klassic Koalas: Ancient Aboriginal Tales in New Retellings
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Cute and cuddly is how koalas are usually described, but in this collection of eight Aboriginal tale retellings, these endearing marsupials possess a more complex character. Set in the Outback during the Dreamtime—the time of creation "when neither men nor animals had taken their final forms" —these *pourquoi* tales explain why the koala and many of his fellow inhabitants of Australia exhibit certain physical and behavioral characteristics today.

In "The Koala Has Strong Arms," for example, many of Earth's starving creatures hear about the plentiful Australia. Starfish devises a plan to steal the selfish Whale's large canoe, and with Koala at the paddle, the animals make it to fertile land before Whale arrives. An ensuing fight on the shore leaves Whale stabbed in the neck, Starfish hiding among the rocks in a shallow pool, and Koala's ears stretched apart. As a result, whales now use blowholes, starfish still hide in sandy rock pools, and koalas have strong arms and flattened faces.

Other fascinating stories include "The Koala's Tail Ends in a Drought," which portrays why Koala has no tail as a reminder of his thoughtlessness, and "The Koala's Clinging Baby," which explains why koala babies cling to their mothers and why a shaman's magic paint marks remain on koalas' faces. The final tale in the volume, however, is a darker retelling that involves the death of a boy. The description is age-appropriate and the outcome, in which he is turned into a koala that makes the laws of the land and the trees grow, is uplifting.

This title is part of a series of books focused on koalas, with a portion of the proceeds allocated to the Australian Wildlife Hospital, established by Steve ("The Crocodile Hunter") and Terri Irwin. The author has been a writer of fantasy, environmental fiction, mystery, and poetry for more than thirty years. Her ecological fantasy novel, *A Dream of Drowned Hollow*, won

Andre Norton's Gryphon Award. The illustrator, a graphic designer and author of *Koalas: Moving Portraits of Serenity*, along with the founder of the Central Ohio Art Academy and several young artists from the academy, capture scenes from the tales in digitally rendered illustrations. While a few are cartoonish, the majority are eye-catching with brightly colored animals and landscapes.

In the tradition of storytelling, the author employs an engaging yet respectful tone to recreate these ancient tales. A glossary provides useful descriptions of less familiar animals and terms. Whether used in an educational setting to teach the diverse animal life and folklore of the often overlooked Australia or simply for the stories themselves, this title will appeal to older elementary and middle school students, eager to learn about the kind, mischievous, and secretive sides of Koala.

Angela Leeper