

Frederick McCubbin
A bush burial



Learn
resource
levels 2-10





A bush burial

Frederick McCubbin

Born Melbourne 1855; died Melbourne 1917

Themes

Australian Impressionism, *en plein air* painting, narrative, pioneer history, landscape, Australian bush

McCubbin's bush-themed works are populated with models that were readily accessible: artist friends, family members and local neighbours that he cast as the required subject—whether archetypal pioneering figures or lost children.

Lisa Sullivan, *Frederick McCubbin—Whisperings in wattle boughs*, exhibition catalogue, Geelong Gallery, 2021



A bush burial

Frederick McCubbin's painting *A bush burial* (1890) holds a significant position in the history of Geelong Gallery as one of only ten works acquired in its first year of collecting: made possible through the support of community donations.

At the time of the acquisition, Frederick McCubbin had established his reputation as one of the founding members of what came to be known as the Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism.

Throughout the 1890s and into the early 1900s he created a series of large-scale paintings focusing on pioneering history. Here, Frederick McCubbin translates the melancholy subject of graveside or funeral scenes into the local landscape, referring to the history and achievements of the pioneers in Australia whilst acknowledging the loneliness and hardship they experienced.

Frederick McCubbin
A bush burial 1890
oil on canvas
Geelong Gallery
Purchased by public subscription, 1900
Photographer: Andrew Curtis



Frederick McCubbin— Timeline

1855

Frederick McCubbin was born in Melbourne on 25 February.

1870s

Attended art classes at the Artisans School of Design at Trades Hall, Carlton, and the National Gallery Art School in Swanston Street.

1885

Established an artists' camp with Louis Abraham and Tom Roberts in Box Hill, Melbourne.

1886

Appointed drawing master of the School of Design at the National Gallery Art School; he held this role for the remainder of his working life.

1889

McCubbin married Annie Moriarty (the couple had seven children between 1890 and 1906).

1889

The 9 by 5 Impression Exhibition was the first major exhibition of Australian Impressionist paintings, held at Buxton's Rooms on Swanston Street.

1901

Inspired by the Australian bush, McCubbin moved to a property at Mount Macedon, that he and his wife named 'Fontainebleau' after the famous forest in France.

1916

McCubbin took leave from his teaching duties due to illness and died the following year from a heart attack.



Frederick McCubbin
The pioneer 1904
oil on canvas
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1906
Photography: NGV



Victorian curriculum— levels 2 to 6

Discuss

Describe what your eyes are first drawn to in the painting *A bush burial* and discuss why?

What story is unfolding in the painting? What visual clues has the artist Frederick McCubbin provided to assist the viewer in understanding his intentions or meaning in the painting?

Describe the different colours that McCubbin has used to paint the Australian landscape. What other visual elements can you see in the painting? For example, line, shape, texture, form, space, and value?

Frederick McCubbin painted large scenes showing the challenging lives of colonial settlers and pioneers. What do you imagine life would have been like for people living during this time?

Explore

McCubbin painted much of this large canvas *en plein air*, a French term meaning 'in the open air'. Research the French artist Claude Monet (1840–1926) who also painted in this manner and his painting *The Bodmer Oak, Fontainebleau Forest* 1865 (Metropolitan Museum of Art) and discuss the similarities and differences in comparison to Frederick McCubbin's *A bush burial*. Notice the artists' use of colour, style, brushstrokes and setting.

Make

Create a series of small paintings exploring a unique environment in your local area. Set up an easel outside and capture different times of the day and the changing atmosphere using paint. Experiment with different tones to explore the effects of light on the environment.



Frederick McCubbin
A bush burial 1890
oil on canvas
Geelong Gallery
Purchased by public subscription, 1900
Photographer: Andrew Curtis



Victorian curriculum— levels 7 to 10

Discuss

Discuss the visual elements McCubbin has used in *A bush burial* to create a mood? Consider the artist's use of colour, texture and light.

How does McCubbin explore complex ideas about life and death in the painting? Consider rituals, religious and cultural aspects in 19th century Australia?

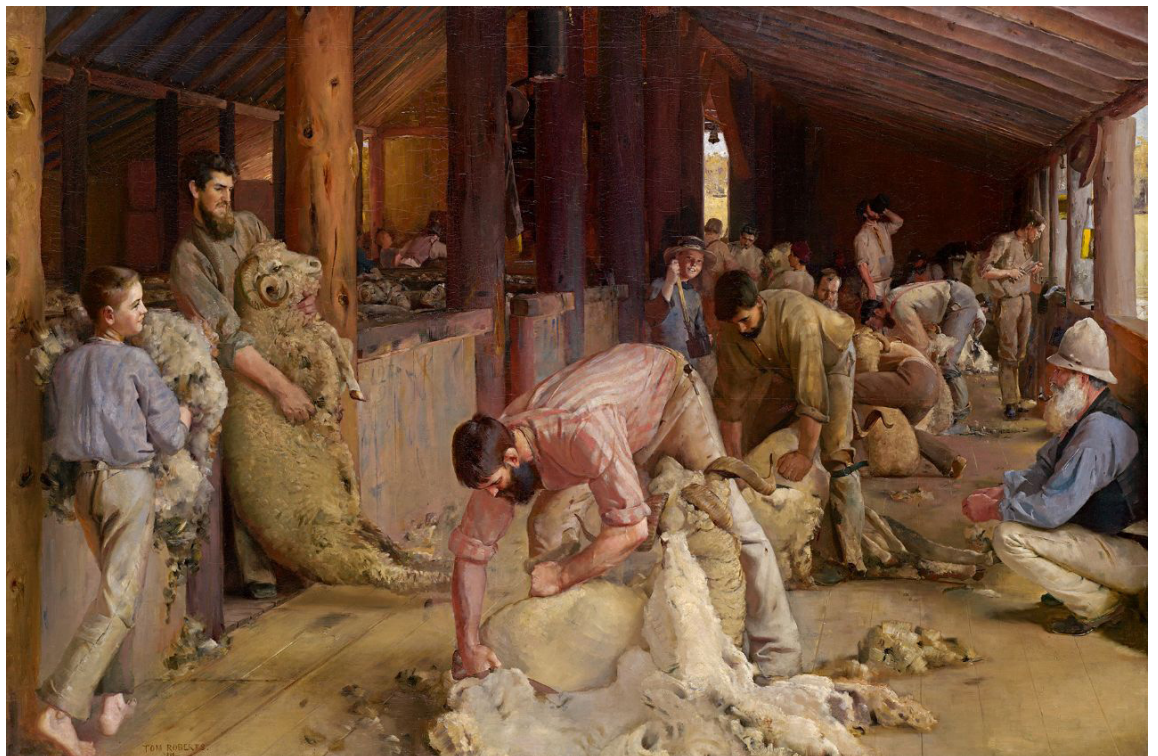
How does this painting represent ideas relating to an Australian identity, culture and history in the lead up to the Federation of Australia in 1901? How have our ideas of nationhood evolved since 1890? What voices are missing from this narrative?

Explore

Frederick McCubbin is a founding member of what came to be known as the Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism. Research the history of the Heidelberg School and the work of fellow member and artist Tom Roberts. Like McCubbin, Roberts also explored ideas about nationhood through his paintings. As a class analyse Roberts' painting *Shearing the rams* 1890 (National Gallery of Victoria) and compare with the painting *A bush burial* 1890. Discuss how the artists have used different forms of expression and subject matter.

Make

McCubbin and his contemporaries were influenced by Australian poetry, including works by Adam Lindsay Gordon. Look closely at McCubbin's *A bush burial* and write a short poem or creative writing piece on your observations of the different effects of light. Or write a short story from the perspective of one of the characters in the painting?



Tom Roberts
Shearing the rams 1890
oil on canvas
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Felton Bequest, 1932
Photography: NGV

Curriculum links

Victorian curriculum/Visual arts/levels 2 to 10

- Analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed in artworks and how they are viewed by audiences
- Identify and connect specific features of visual artworks from different cultures, historical and contemporary times, including artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Victorian curriculum/History/levels 2 to 10

- Levels 5 and 6: Significant contributions of individuals and groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and migrants, to changing Australian society
- Levels 9 and 10: Intended and unintended causes and effects of contact and extension of settlement of European power(s), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

