

# Keys to the collection— Stories

## Frederick McCubbin

“McCubbin was happy to live in or near Melbourne all his life and his subjects were the places he knew and loved best.”

—Anne Gray, *Happy beyond measure: a life*, 2009

**1855** Frederick McCubbin was born in Melbourne on 25 February, the third of eight children to a baker, Alexander McCubbin, from Scotland and his English wife Ann, nee McWilliams.

**1872** He studied at the National Gallery of Victoria School of Design.

**1886** He was appointed drawing master of the School of Design at the National Gallery of Victoria and remained in this role for the rest of his working life.

**1889** He married Annie Moriarty and they had seven children.

**1901** Inspired by the Australian bush, he moved to a property on Mount Macedon, that he and his wife named ‘Fontainebleau’ after the famous forest in France.

**1916** McCubbin took leave from his teaching duties on account of illness and died the following year from a heart attack. He is buried in the Brighton Cemetery.



### A bush burial—

Frederick McCubbin painted Australian bush scenes showing the challenging lives of our colonial settlers and pioneers. His paintings involve stories about people who lived over 120 years ago. Life of the time was hard and conditions were unforgiving.

As was his custom in this period, McCubbin painted much of this large canvas outside. To capture the exact colours and light of the environment McCubbin would have returned to the painting over many days. The figures were completed from models back in his studio.

Art critics have never agreed as to who has been buried. We must look for clues to try to work this out for ourselves.

We can feel the loneliness and sadness of this scene and can imagine how it might feel to be there, but we might also imagine the great achievements of the pioneer who is being buried and the legacy this person has left behind.

**Geelong  
Gallery**

AusVELS level 2 to 6

[geelonggallery.org.au/learn](http://geelonggallery.org.au/learn)

Frederick McCubbin  
*A bush burial* (detail) 1890  
oil on canvas  
Collection: Geelong Gallery

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### Frederick McCubbin

Australian 1855–1917

*A bush burial* 1890

oil on canvas

122.5 x 224.5 cm

Collection: Geelong Gallery

Purchased by public

subscription, 1900

#### Questions

Why do artists paint narrative or story-telling works of art?

How does this painting make you feel and why?

#### Research

Explore other Frederick McCubbin paintings from this period. Explain what you think someone your age would look like and what you would be doing if you lived in the late 19th century?

How different would your life be?

#### Activity

Imagine yourself back in the late 19th century in Australia.

Draw or paint yourself back in this time to tell a personal story. You need to consider what you want to communicate about yourself and what you need to add to the background to tell your story.