



Kimberley Society

Book Note

Red Dirt Talking by Jacqueline Wright. Fremantle Press, Fremantle, 2012, 368 pages, ISBN 9781921888793. Paperback. RRP \$27.99.

Set in the Pilbara, in a fictitious town and Aboriginal community in the north-west of Western Australia, this book is written by a Broome-based author with a Kimberley and Pilbara work background. The setting, given the author's capacity for conveying the feel of the north and its culture, could easily be transposed to the Kimberley. Jacqueline Wright's ability to tap into the connection between that culture and anthropological studies also gives the setting fluidity.

Annie, a 40-year-old anthropology postgraduate, is one of the book's central characters. Unprepared for the challenges she faces in her fieldwork, she becomes distracted by, and then immersed in, a mystery surrounding the disappearance of Kuj, an eight-year-old girl at the centre of a custody battle.

Like Dave Warner's [Before It Breaks](#), this novel graphically portrays the discomfort and enervation that most people feel during the build-up before the wet. Here, too, the weather exacerbates rather than causes the personal tensions underpinning the story, an aspect that becomes clear only as more of each thread is revealed.

Red Dirt Talking won the TAG Hungerford Award (most promising unpublished manuscript) in 2010 and was long-listed for the Miles Franklin Award in 2013.

[Sample chapters](#) of the book are available on the Fremantle Press website.

Cathie Clement