# The Frog Who Drank the World Dry

*The Gunaikurnai (Gunai/Kurnai) · Gippsland, Victoria*

## Where It Comes From

The Gunaikurnai are the Aboriginal people of Gippsland, in south-eastern Victoria. Their flood stories were written down in the late nineteenth century by A. W. Howitt, a settler and amateur anthropologist, in R. Brough Smyth's *The Aborigines of Victoria* (1878) and in his own *Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904). Today the frog is best known through children's books as Tiddalik; a Gunaikurnai cultural trail calls him Tidelek. These are stories that belong to the Gunaikurnai, retold here only in outline, from the published record.

# What Happens

Long ago, a huge frog swallowed all the water in the world. The rivers, the lakes and the billabongs dried up, and the animals and people were dying of thirst.

The animals tried to make the frog laugh so the water would come out. One after another they danced and made faces, and the frog would not laugh. At last the eel wriggled and twisted until the frog burst out laughing.

All the water rushed out at once, so much that it flooded the land and many were drowned.

In a related Gunai story, a flood left a few people stranded on a mud island. The Pelican came in his canoe and ferried them across to safety. He wanted to keep one of the women for himself, but she tricked him and escaped, and the angry Pelican began painting himself white for war. That, the story says, is why pelicans are black and white.

## What Stands Out

**Why the flood came.** One creature kept all the water for itself.

**Who was saved, and how.** The few who were carried off the mud island by the Pelican.

**The boat or the refuge.** The Pelican's canoe.

**What came after.** The water is shared again; the land lives. And the pelican wears his colours to this day.

Children's versions make the story cheerful, but the old record is clear that the water came back as a disaster. Hoarding what everyone needs, the story suggests, ends badly for everyone.

THINK IT THROUGH

*The frog kept the water for itself, and the release was a flood. What happens when good things are hoarded instead of shared?*

# Sources

A. W. Howitt, in R. Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria* (1878), vol. 1, and in *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* (1904), p. 486; both as given in James George Frazer, *Folk-Lore in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1918), pp. 235–236.

"Tiddalik", Wikipedia; and the Bataluk Cultural Trail's telling of the frog at Port Albert, batalukculturaltrail.com.au.

Everything here is a summary in our own words. Where a story has many tellings, we follow the source named above and say so.