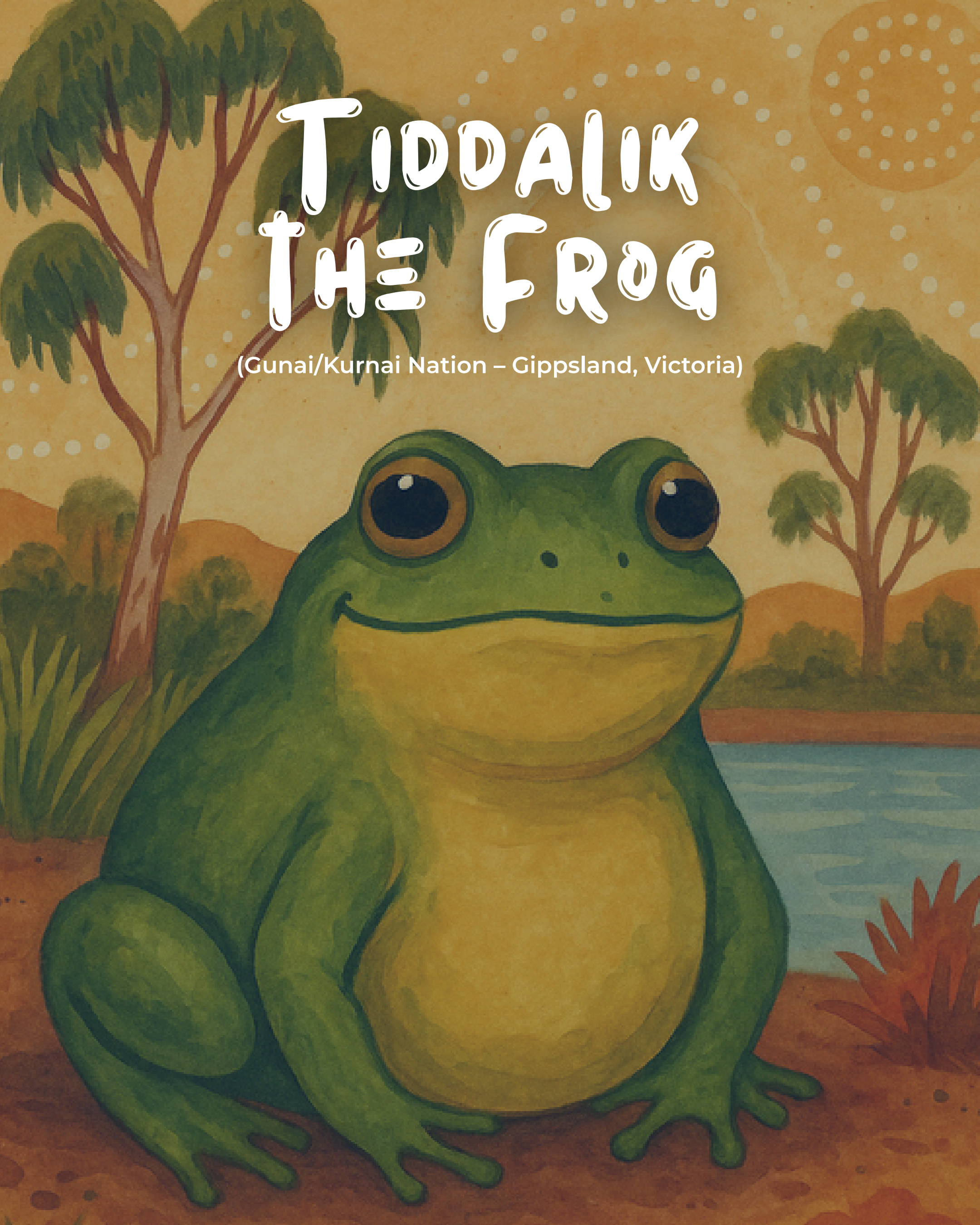
Tiddalik the Frog

(Gunai/Kurnai Nation – Gippsland, Victoria)



Tiddalik the Frog

(Gunai/Kurnai Nation – Gippsland, Victoria)

A long time ago, in the Dreaming, there lived a frog called Tiddalik. Now, Tiddalik was not like the little frogs you see by creeks today. He was enormous — so big that when he sat by the waterhole, he looked almost like a boulder with eyes.

One morning, Tiddalik woke with a thirst so strong that he began to drink and drink. He slurped up the water from the waterhole. He gulped down the streams. He even licked the morning dew from the grass. He drank until every drop was gone, and the land lay dry beneath the sun.

The other animals soon discovered what had happened. The rivers were empty, the lakes were mud, and the clouds gave no rain. The kangaroos drooped with thirst, the birds could not sing, and the eels and fish flopped helplessly in the cracked riverbeds.
All the creatures gathered in despair. “What shall we do?” asked wombat, his voice dry and hoarse. “Without water, we cannot live.”



Old wise echidna shook his spines. “We cannot fight Tiddalik,” he said. “But perhaps we can trick him. If we make him laugh, the water will come spilling out again.”

So the animals agreed to try.
First came emu, who strutted and flapped his wings, running in circles until the dust rose high. Tiddalik watched with his heavy-lidded eyes, but he did not so much as smile.

Next kookaburra swooped down, tilting his head this way and that, chuckling his loudest laugh. But Tiddalik only blinked and sat still.

Then kangaroo tried. He bounded high and twisted in the air, landing in a heap on his tail. The other animals giggled, but Tiddalik’s wide belly stayed round and silent.

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One by one, the animals performed — possum dangled upside down, lizard flicked his tongue, magpie warbled silly songs — yet nothing moved Tiddalik.

At last, little eel stepped forward. She wriggled onto the cracked mud and began to dance, slipping and sliding in the dust. She twisted into knots, curled herself in loops, and flicked her tail so suddenly that she landed on her head.

The animals gasped — and then burst out laughing. Even stern old wombat chuckled.

And finally, Tiddalik's great mouth began to twitch. First a croak, then a gurgle, and then — "HA! HA! HA!" He roared with laughter.

As he laughed, the water came rushing out of him — gushing and tumbling in a mighty flood. Rivers filled, billabongs sparkled, and the thirsty animals rushed to drink. The gum trees sighed with relief as their roots drank deep once more.



When at last the water settled, the land was green again, and life returned. Tiddalik, tired from his long drink, shrank smaller and smaller, until he was no longer a giant. From then on, he lived as the frogs we know today, croaking by creeks and ponds, a reminder of what had once happened.