On Wednesday, the 11th of August, Yr 1/2 and Yr 4/5 had the privilege of a visit from a local bush poet. Mr Ilett brought along some classic poems from Banjo Patterson, as well as originals he’d put together over the years. Some of the stories he’d written were about working in the cane fields and the people he’d met during those years.

One of his poem books was extra special. It was given to him when he was a young boy, and though tattered and worn, he treasured it dearly and still enjoyed reading it.

Before he began his poems, Mr Ilett explained how bush poetry came about. Many years ago, stockmen in the outback drove cattle for months on end along stock routes for grass to feed the herds. At night, they would sit around the campfires and put their stories to rhyme as something to do. Some of these poems were even turned into songs, like Waltzing Matilda.

Mr Ilett captured the attention of his listening audience while he recited the bush poems with a passion.

In Yr 1/2, Mr Ilett read his own poem. It was about cutting cane (by hand), and building a short track of railway line close by so they could load the cut cane onto bins on the line. When they finished a block of cane, they had to lift the rail tracks and rebuild
the line at the next cane block. He had the class interacting with him by getting them to call out ‘Railo’ at the end of each verse. By the last verse, their ‘Railo’ was loud and full of spirit.

Mr Ilett also asked the students questions related to his poems, which included bikes, trains and railways. The class was keen to tell him their own bike and train stories.

And it wasn’t just the little kids engrossed. Mr Hinton and Miss Robba found it very entertaining as well.

After three poems, the Yr 1/2 students thanked Mr Ilett. Next he visited the Yr 4/5 class.

Mr Ilett read three different poems to the older students, explaining a little about them before he started. He included another Banjo Patterson classic and
another original. His own poem mentioned names of the men he worked with, some which are still around Childers and some which the students recognised.

The students were impressed, particularly when he recited his own poems off by heart. They had lots of questions to ask when he’d finished:

When did you start reading poems? How many poems have you written?
And then someone asked, “What is your favourite out of the poems you’ve written?”

Mr Ilett asked the class if they’d heard of Banjo Patterson’s, ‘The Man from Snowy River’. He went on to explain how he’d written another version of it, and it was his favourite. In his rendition, he is the actual man from Snowy River and he’d ridden his horse over the cliff after the herd of brumbies only because he couldn’t stop his bolting horse. Skill had nothing to do with his ride down the very steep descent. It was fear which held him to the saddle all the way to the bottom. And the only reason he brought the herd of brumbies back single-handedly was because they were trapped in a gully and had nowhere to go but with him.

Totally intrigued, the class asked him to recite it to them. It was funny and enjoyable to listen to.

The students enjoyed Mr Ilett’s visit and couldn’t wait to recite the poems they’d been working on in front of the class.