



Background Information for Teachers

These notes provide further information for a range of topics addressed in the three themes' Teacher Guides. They include:

- Explanation of terms Moieties and Clans
- Aspects of Aboriginal Communities
- Language and Language Loss
- Identity and the Stolen Generation
- Background Notes for *Aboriginal Art forms*
- The Place of Art in Aboriginal Culture and Communities
- History – and construction of history
- Additional Resources
- Challenge Your Students
- History – and construction of history

Please note: included in the BLMs for each theme are two generic sheets:

1. An Evaluation Rubric which may be used for any oral presentation, and the first four criteria are suitable for a range of written activities.
2. A Student Guide for Research which may be used as it is by students, or please feel free to modify it according to your students' needs.

Explanation of terms Moieties and Clans

The Yolngu

The Yolngu are the Indigenous Australians who live in northeast Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.

Yolngu people are linked by language and a rich and complex Culture. Their social structure is based on **clans** and **moieties**.

Clans are extended family groups and they are the foundation of Yolngu social organisation. There are more than 50 Yolngu clans in northeast Arnhem Land. Each clan has its own traditional land or Country, their *wanga*; their own dialect or version of the Yolngu language, the Yolngu Matha; and their own song lines and ceremonies or *bungul*.

Clan membership is patrilineal: a person belongs to the clan of their father.

Beyond the clan, the Yolngu world is divided into two halves, called **moieties**. (The word moiety means half). People, animals, rocks and even winds belong to either the Dhuwa or Yirritja moiety.

Text courtesy of the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia

Here are some references for kinship discussion, many more are available on the Internet.

<http://www.dhimurru.com.au/yolngu-Culture.html>

http://livingknowledge.anu.edu.au/learningsites/seaCountry/03_moieties.htm

<http://www.jawoyn.org/jawoyn-people/kinship>

Aspects of Aboriginal Communities

Many aspects listed have been addressed in the Teaching Ideas sections, of relevant themes. Here is further information/ideas about some of the issues, for you to select from, and adapt as required.

A key issue affecting Aboriginal communities is the importance of Language to the people, and the effects of Language loss. The following references provide points for discussion of the issue.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indigenous_Australian_group_names

This site provides a lengthy list of Aboriginal language groups and the languages they speak. It will give you a feel for the extent of the endangered language issue, and the enormity of implications for Aboriginal people.

Language and Language Loss

- *Thunderman* is a film to hear language and experience it.
- In *Djulpan*, Djungadjunga stresses the importance of learning Yolngu way alongside 'balanda' (white man) way. This is about language, songs, stories ... and he states why he thinks this is important.
- In *Miiku and Tinta*, (Cape York) Patrick says: *I have a dream that one day we won't learn English all the time, we will learn our language and English will be our second language.*
- View *Miiku and Tinta* and read Sunno's Vignette and this statement by Murray Butcher who is also a member of the Paakantji community

The way we pass our language on has been disrupted through colonisation and language loss. This has escalated since the 1940s and right up to the present state where our language is on the verge of extinction. We don't want that to happen. We want to keep our identity. We want to keep our Culture and our heritage. We don't want to lose any of those things because they are important to us. They give us a window into our Culture, our identity and who we are.

- You may choose to conduct a class discussion drawing out what you/students have learned about why language matters, and why Murray and Patrick speak about the importance of continuing to learn their languages.
- It is important to note that Australian Indigenous languages are on the UNESCO list of critically endangered languages.
- Also, in the light of language loss you may like to discuss implications of this quote from Article 15 of the United Nations Draft Declaration of Indigenous People's Rights:

Indigenous children have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State. All Indigenous peoples also have this right and the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own language, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.

- Questions like those below those provide a solid basis for investigating the importance of language – add your own:
What is a critically endangered language?
How many languages are on the planet?
How many are we likely to lose this century if effective action is not taken?
What is lost when languages die?
Why do they die? Why is it important to work to ensure that languages survive?
What can be done to lessen language loss?
- Answers to those questions may be found in these links:
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/Culture/themes/endangered-languages/>
<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/enduring-voices/>
<http://www.unesco.org/Culture/languages-atlas>

As Steven Jampijinpa, a Warlpiri elder from Lajamanu in the Tanami Desert and an experienced educator, puts it:

Language is like a tree: it makes you stand firm in Country, gives you a sense of identity ... I was born Warlpiri and I will die Warlpiri but if you lose language then you are gone. Language is a defence; it is kurdiji (a shield). It is strength. (Steven Jampijinpa Patrick: Patrick, Holmes and Box. 2008: 24)

Traditional languages spoken in the Northern Territory are some of the most endangered on the planet. This area is identified by the Enduring Voices project as one of the most linguistically significant areas in the world, to be under severe threat. In Wugularr, where Alex's story *My Country* is created, another student made a slide show about young men singing in Language with Wagilak Songman, Roy Wunyumbi Ashley. In his script he articulates, *I'd like to sing but I don't know the language because it's too hard for me to say the words, but I'd like to sing the song. Jason and Damien [young men] can speak the language and sing the song and I'm proud of them.*

This is a link to the story created <http://sharingstories.org/content/learning-songs>.

This is a great link for language loss and implications for cultural knowledge loss <http://travel.nationalgeographic.com.au/travel/enduring-voices/>.

Identity and the Stolen Generation

An issue which hasn't been explored in depth in these resources, but which is vital to Reconciliation, and Aboriginal people's sense of identity, is the Stolen Generation. There is a great deal of information about the damaging government policy that resulted in the Stolen Generation, and its impacts on Aboriginal individuals, their families and their communities, available on the Internet, and elsewhere. We have flagged it here in recognition of its importance to Aboriginal communities and their people, and the way it has affected them and their Culture, and sense of Country.

When we further develop these resources we will develop this topic with relevant additional media elements.

Notes for *Aboriginal Art forms* – to complement the student activity in Community theme and three BLMs: *Symbols in Aboriginal Art*, *Art Research* and *Procedure for Art Stories*.

Art, in all its forms, has a central place in Aboriginal communities as it's an expression of key aspects of their Culture. Art replaces the written word in traditional communities, and is used in contemporary society, in conjunction with written documentation, to record most aspects of life, including: spiritual beliefs, caring for Country, systems of social organization, social practices, responsibilities, and relationships.

We need to understand what art (as used here this term refers to all art forms) means to Aboriginal people, how it's embedded in community life, and how that engenders reasons for people to create a wide range of artworks.

Although principles underpinning the place of art in Aboriginal Culture are universally accepted by all Language groups, the forms of art and techniques used may differ in various parts of our Country. Different Language groups (communities) create artworks focusing on aspects of their own Cultures, and spiritual beliefs linked to the Dreaming.

The Place of Art in Aboriginal Culture and Communities

Artworks play an important part, not only in recording and expressing aspects of life and Culture, but also in teaching children about heritage, the Dreaming, and Country and community responsibilities.

- For all Aboriginal people, the Dreaming is the basis for all life, and is the focus for much of their art.
- Paintings and other artforms often depict Dreaming stories that tell of creation of the world, including aspects like: landforms; watercourses; fire; animals and their features; stars and the heavens ...
- Dreaming stories may also teach each generation about life and Culture, for example: relationships in communities; kinship; respect; laws; behaviour; hunting and gathering ... Symbols depicting aspects of these often appear in artworks. Some symbols are in the public domain while others are sacred and may only be used by the Language group that created them.
- Aboriginal paintings usually tell stories about the artist's land, community and people; provide historical records; and many also pay homage to aspects of the Dreaming.
- We must be sensitive to, and respect, the spirituality and complexity of traditional Aboriginal art, as aspects may be sacred.

History – and construction of history

In *My people, the Karajarri People*, Wynston tells of the Mowla Bluff massacre of his people that took place around the turn of the 19th/20th centuries. History is a construction according to those who have power to construct it. In the instance of the Mowla Bluff massacre, when told from a Karajarri perspective, hundreds of people were killed; while told from a European historical perspective it barely happened.

This links below provide further information about these differing views in relation the Mowla Bluff massacre as discussed in *The Danger Seed* – film in the Culture theme and *My people, the Karajarri people* by Wynston.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coniston_massacre

On this site is a description of another massacre, this time in the Northern Territory. Note differing historical perspectives of the account of the massacre.

<http://www.rouge.com.au/6/whispering.html>

A film called: *Whispering In Our Hearts: The Mowla Bluff Massacre* (2001) tells the same story as *The Danger Seed*. During the making of the film, the director and writer Mitch Torres, was told by the WA Police Department that they had reason 'to believe the massacre allegations are false'.

The above website presents stills from the film and a vivid account of its approach to the story and content. It's interesting to note the reference to 'the history wars'.

<http://monumentaaustralia.org.au/search/display/60844-mowla-bluff-massacre>

Use Wynston's piece and the links provided to discuss the views of journalist and academic Adrian Martin that incidents like the Mowla Bluff Massacre are covered over with official denials based on a lack of 'hard evidence', and that 'whitefella word (with its documentation records)' has had more power than 'blackfella word (with its living, orally transmitted memory'. Discuss with students what the implications of this are for history.

Another example of varying perspectives is the mining companies interpretation of the land, in *Yulu's Coal*: it offers them a resource of coal. On the other hand, the Adnyamathanha people's perspective of the land is that of Yulu's Muda (Dreaming) as told in the film *Yulu's Coal* in which the coal being dug from the ground belongs to Yulu the Kingfisher man and was left by him through the embers of the fires he lit as he travelled to Wilpena Pound.

Additional Resources

The following websites offer further information relating to different media.

Bilwal Medicine – a child's story in the Culture theme

These sites provide further information about bush medicines, explore further yourself. You'll find many websites that discuss a wide variety of bush tucker.

<http://ntmojos.indigenous.gov.au/videos/bush-medicine/>

A young Indigenous journalist learns from his sister about bush medicines on Elcho Island.

<http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/journal/10-most-common-aboriginal-bush-medicines.htm>

Here you'll find a photo gallery of nominations for the 'top ten' bush medicines. Images are accompanied by explanations of what how the remedies are used.

<http://www.anbg.gov.au/gardens/education/programs/pdfs/aboriginal-bush-medicines.pdf>

The Australian National Botanic Gardens provides a single-page factsheet.

http://www.arrawarraCulture.com/fact_sheets/pdfs/15_Medicine.pdf

A two-page illustrated factsheet comes from Garby Elders of the Gumbaynggir Nation, on the mid-north coast of NSW.

<http://www.anthropologysocietysa.com/home/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Clarke-Vol-33-2008.pdf>

This scholarly article, *Aboriginal healing practices and Australian bush medicine*, by Philip Clarke of the SA Museum, is beyond the scope of most students, but allows you to see an example of the level of scholarship on topics such as bush medicine. You could focus on the first page, with its abstract (a particular text type), and introductory paragraphs, and then skim the article, looking at the captioned photos and whatever else catches your eye.

Honeymoon Springs – a child’s story in the Country theme

<http://aics.wa.edu.au/schools/nyikina-mangala-community-school>

Bronson tells this story. He’s from the Jarlmadangah in the Kimberley. To find out more about the school here, go to this website.

The Creation of Trowenna – film in the Country theme

<http://www.nayriniara.com/>

This film is about Bruny Island in Tasmania. On this site we see scenes from the Nayri Niari Good Spirit Festival) on Bruny Island, a gathering which has been held since 2010.

Leigh Maynard pieced together the story of *The Creation of Trowenna* for the *Sharing Our Stories* series book, *The Creation of Trowenna* (Tasmanian Aboriginal Community with Liz Thompson, Pearson 2012). He consulted journal records of early white settlers such as George Augustus Robinson, Protector of Aborigines in Tasmania through the 1830s. Although the Aborigines themselves lost their Languages and Culture because of the harsh assimilation policies of the 1830s onwards, Robinson kept meticulous records of customs, languages, stories and so on. Ironically, it’s these records that today’s Tasmanian Aborigines turn to for information about their own cultural past.

Research the history of Aborigines in Tasmania and particularly the Black War of around 1828 to 1832, and the relocation of survivors to missions on offshore islands. Then discuss why the story of Trowenna needed to be “pieced together”.

Challenge Your Students

Does your school, local council or other local institution have a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)? If not, challenge your students to develop one.

<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans>

Find out more about it on this website. It foregrounds respect for Culture as a key aspect of reconciliation. (See Murray and Patrick Butcher)

Resource created by Alwyn Evans and Liz Thompson.
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