

History

# Traditional Indigenous Life



## For Middle Primary

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# The Land 1

The First Australians travelled through the continent from the Torres Strait Islands all the way down to Tasmania. They found the land, rivers and oceans full of natural resources. They were hunters and gatherers, who learned where to find different kinds of food and sources of fresh water, even in the desert.

They discovered that setting fire to scrubland helped them hunt small animals so they carried firesticks with them. They observed that plants and trees recovered quickly after the fires, growing back greener than before. Burning the scrub also



Wikimedia Commons

Aboriginal scene, Blandowski 1857

helped them to prevent bushfires in the dry season.

They also developed many ways to manage the resources in their territory during the changing seasons of the year. Read about how they used technology and their knowledge of the land below.

- The fibres from the bark of trees and the stems of plants were used to make string, nets, baskets and mats. The fibres had to be soaked in water first to make them soft. Sheets of bark could also be softened and shaped to make canoes and shelters.
- Hard wood from certain types of trees like wattle and acacia was made into tools for hunting. A remarkable tool was the spear-thrower invented by Indigenous Australians from central Australia. It was a lever that helped hunters throw their spears further. Spear-throwers could also be used for carrying water and food.
- Indigenous Australians were the first bread makers in the world. Millstones or grindstones (see image) helped to make the job of bread-making easier for women and girls. The flour was ground from native seeds, mixed with water and cooked in hot coals. The damper was tasty and nutritious. The two stones were affectionately known as "mother and child" by some indigenous groups.



☐ Study the image on page 3 with a partner.

1. Make a list of the different activities that you can see happening in the indigenous campsite.

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find evidence in the image that this was a good place for Indigenous Australians to make a camp. The evidence I found is:

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## Foods around the campsite

Fill in the table with foods that Indigenous Australians probably gathered and hunted near the campsite. Choose foods from the list below and add your own items of food that might be found around the campsite.



honeycombs

fish

goanias

mussels

flowers

possums

wattlebirds

wattle seeds

echidnas

ducks

frogs

berries

yams

moths

grubs

pigeons

birds eggs

lilies

cockatoos

macadamia nuts

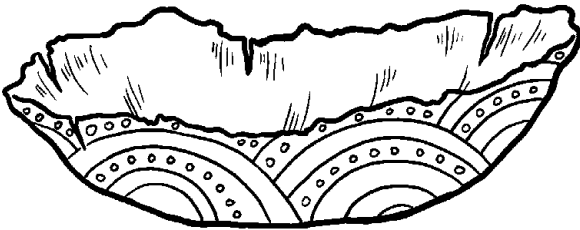
### Foods Gathered

### Foods Hunted

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☐ On the back of this sheet draw some of the things that Indigenous Australians made using materials from their natural environment.

- ☐ Study these images carefully. Suggest how Indigenous Australians might have used these artefacts to help them in their daily lives.

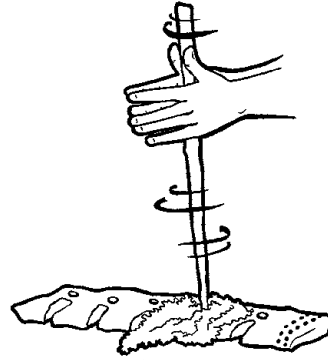
**A**



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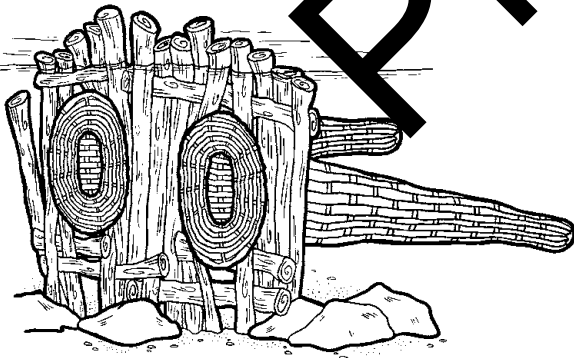
**B**



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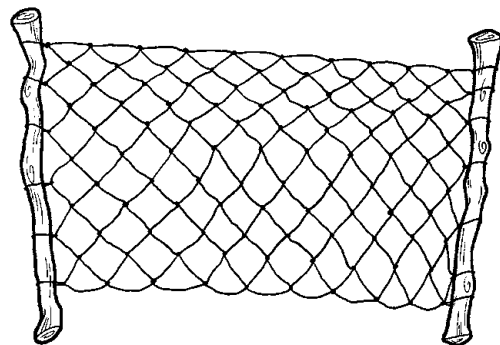
**C**



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**D**



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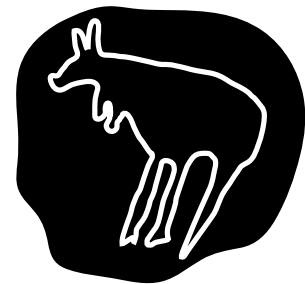
# Indigenous Art 1

Art was a very special part of life for Indigenous Australians. Art told stories about events in the history of different clans and often showed a clan's totems or emblems, which were usually birds, reptiles and animals. Men, women and children painted artistic designs on their bodies whenever they attended ceremonies.

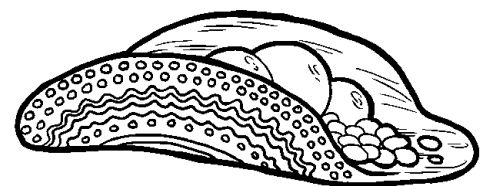
Indigenous Australians used things which they found in their environment to make materials for their art work. Paints were made by grinding rocks and clays into a powder called ochre, then mixing it with orchid juice or saliva. Paint brushes were made from sticks with their ends softened, or from strips of bark with their ends chewed so that they could make thick strokes. Even hair tied to a twig made a good brush. Cave walls, smooth rocks, bark, wooden artefacts and sand were ideal surfaces for creating beautiful paintings and designs.

## Different kinds of indigenous art

Engravings were made on soft sandstone rocks using pegs to make holes around an outline. Many rock engravings show animals that are now extinct, like the thylacine.

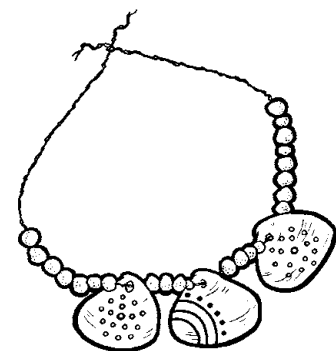


Artefacts like boomerangs and spear-throwers were decorated with clan totems. The dot technique has been used on this coolamon (right).



Cave painting is the oldest form of art in the world. Artists often used the x-ray method to show a person or animal's bones and insides.

Necklaces were made from seashells, polished bone and seeds known as mangutji. Red seeds were highly prized by women for necklace-making in desert regions.



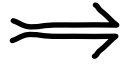
## Activity

## Indigenous Art 2

- ☐ Look at these symbols that are used in indigenous desert art.



tracks



kangaroo



emu



honey ant



grub



possum



club



digging stick



human



spears



nest



well or waterhole



man



rain



star



quandong



bush plum



bowl



rain/flowers/  
ants/eggs/fruit



rainbow/cloud/  
sand dune/cliff

- ☐ Create a message in the space below using the symbols above. Can a classmate interpret your message?

Write what your message means on the back of this sheet.

## How to make a paintbrush

- ☐ Indigenous Australians obtained all of their art supplies from their natural surroundings. Use the information on page 6 to write instructions for 'How to make paint and a paintbrush from natural materials'. Set your instructions out as numbered steps.



# Indigenous Totems 1

## Receiving a totem

In all families, the birth of a baby is a cause for celebration. In Indigenous Australian society, ceremonies take place to announce a baby's arrival into his or her community. This is also the time to give the baby a totem. A totem can be in the form of a plant, animal, landscape or weather feature. It is something that the clan has had a close connection with, over many generations. These totems become the clan's emblems and often appear on their artefacts like message sticks or ornaments worn during sacred ceremonies such as corroboree dances. Members in a clan who share the same totem enjoy a very special relationship with one another that lasts a lifetime.

## How are totems chosen?

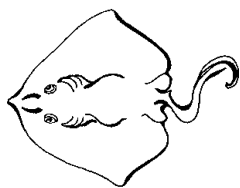
Totems are connected to the place where a clan lives. Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders living in coastal regions, choose totems which are connected to the sea and its marine animals and fish. For example, the shark is the totem for Indigenous Australians from the Murray Islands. This means that the Islanders cannot hunt or eat sharks. The Islanders also believe that sharks will protect them when they are at sea fishing. They decorate pendants and shells with shark images to communicate to each other and show other clans that this is their emblem.

These are some other ways in which a totem is chosen:

- A special event close to a child's birth such as a snake crossing the mother's path may ensue in a snake becoming the totem of the child;
- A plant, animal or object that is believed to be an ancestor of the person receiving the totem.

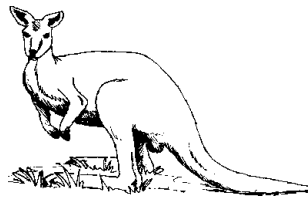
## Examples of clan totems

Wuthathi people  
(Shelbourne Bay in  
North Queensland)



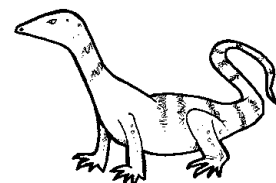
Diamond stingray

Northern Aranda people  
(120 kilometres west of Alice  
Springs, Northern Territory)



Red Kangaroo

Bunjalung people  
(Byron Bay area in New  
South Wales)



Goanna



1. How is a totem chosen for a child?

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2. How do Indigenous Australians show that their totem is a special part of their life?

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3. Totems are connected to the place where a clan lives. Suggest totems that could be chosen by Indigenous Australians living in the areas below. An example from each environment has been given to start you off.

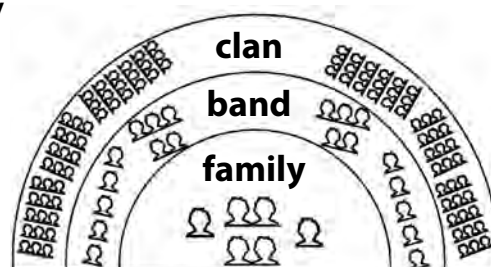
rainforest	inland river	coastal area	desert region
cassowary	frog	crocodile	taipan snake

Choose a totem for yourself and draw a picture of it below. Annotate your totem with the following information: (1) how your totem is connected to the place where you live and (2) which rules surround your totem.

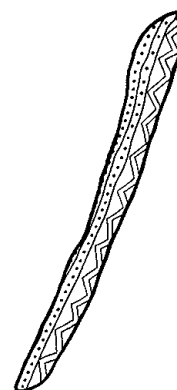
# Family Life 1

At the centre of pre-contact indigenous society was the family. Families sat around warm campfires, cooked together and shared a hut.

Several families came together to form a band. Band leaders were older men who had been successful hunters and warriors. Each band had an area in the territory where they had the right to hunt and collect food. Bands met frequently to arrange marriages, catch up on news, trade, share food and hold ceremonies.



Indigenous Australians belonged to a particular clan because they spoke the same language. Clans could have as many as 500 people. Members of the same clan usually got on well with one another. At times though, clans fought each other because one clan had invaded another's territory or broken its laws. If a person wanted to cross another clan's land, they had to carry a message stick to announce that they weren't a criminal or they risked being attacked.



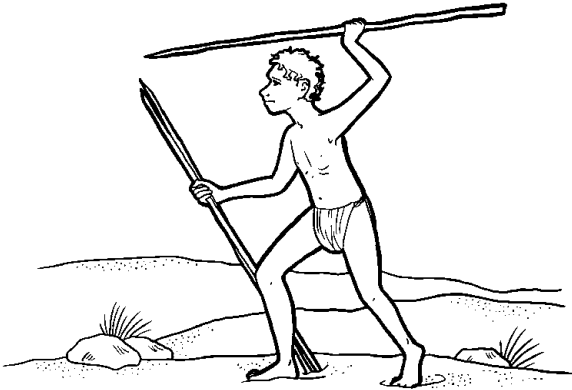
## Men and women's work

Men and women and boys and girls had certain jobs to do in their daily lives. This table shows how the work was shared.

Men's work	Women's work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Men travelled away from the camp for days at a time to hunt large animals to provide food for the band. They made weapons for hunting and produced tools.</li> <li>They protected the band.</li> <li>They climbed trees to fetch eggs and honey.</li> <li>They taught boys hunting methods and clan laws.</li> <li>They passed on Dreaming stories.</li> <li>They healed sick people.</li> <li>They made laws.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women and children spent many hours a day together gathering plants, seeds and insects and hunting small animals.</li> <li>They found and collected water.</li> <li>They made baskets, mats, string, etc.</li> <li>They decided how food was distributed.</li> <li>They looked after children. Boys, after the age of six, joined the men.</li> <li>They taught girls bush skills.</li> <li>They passed on Dreaming stories.</li> <li>They healed sick people.</li> <li>They made laws.</li> </ul>

- ☐ Think about the statement below. Share your ideas with a partner.

*Indigenous men worked harder than indigenous women.*



- ☐ Complete the table below with your opinions on this topic.

I agree because	I don't agree because
<div>Preview</div>	

- ☐ Take a survey of the opinions of the class on the topic, 'Indigenous men worked harder than indigenous women'. Present your results in a graph or in tally form on the back of this sheet.

**My conclusions:**

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# Kinship 1

*Our relationship with other members of the family is called kinship. Members of your family are called your kin. In European cultures, there are terms to describe how you are related to your family, such as: grandfather/grandmother, mother/father, son/daughter, etc. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, there are as many as 70 terms to name how a person is related to someone else.*



## Kinship names

Kinship or "skin" names are given to a baby when they are born and come from both the mother's and father's side of the family. Kinship names give information to other Indigenous Australians about how they are related to a child. These names also describe a person's place in the community and his/her responsibilities and duties.

## Who could be your kin in indigenous culture?

English term	What the term means in indigenous culture
brother/sister	brother/sister/children of mother's sister/children of father's brother/other children the same age
cousin	children of father's sister/children of mother's brother
father/mother	father/mother/uncle/aunt/other people the same age as the father or mother
grandfather/grandmother	grandfather/grandmother/other people of grandfather and grandmother's age/respected Elder of the clan

## Why the kinship system is an important custom

For a clan to live peacefully, there had to be rules and laws. The kinship system decided important matters such as who a person could marry, who had to pay for another person's bad deeds and who had to look after the older or sick people. An interesting kinship law was 'the mother-in-law' ban. It was a custom that all Indigenous Australians shared. A man or woman was never allowed to talk to his or her mother-in-law. This ban was introduced perhaps to avoid fighting or to show respect to the position of a mother-in-law in the family.

## Activity

## Kinship 2

- Look at the kinship table on page 12. Use it to complete the diagram below by writing the names of the people who would be in your extended family. You can include friends of the family, neighbours and other people in the school and local community who you know well.

grandfather  
grandmother

father  
mother

brother  
sister

cousin

- Using your diagram, write down your ideas about your new extended family.

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### Discuss with a partner

- How many names do you have? You can include pet names and nicknames. Do you know why you were given your first name/s?

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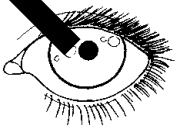

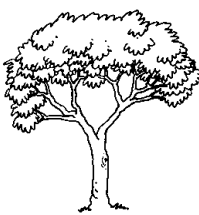


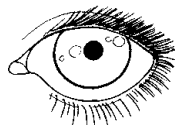

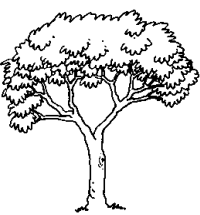

# Language 1

Before Europeans arrived to colonise Australia, there were about 250 different languages spoken by Indigenous Australians. Some of those languages were as different to each other as English is to Spanish today. Clan members not only spoke their own language, but could speak the languages of other clans who lived in nearby territories. This meant that Indigenous Australians could usually speak three or four languages.

The first Indigenous Australians settled around the coastline of northern Australia and shared a common language. This language was spoken and not written down. After some time, migrating groups spread out over the continent and lost contact with each other. Different languages began to develop because people needed to communicate ideas about the new locations in which they were living. If Indigenous Australians living in the rainforest met with Indigenous Australians from desert regions, the two groups would not have been able to understand each other's languages. For example, the word 'cassowary' or 'saltwater' would not have existed in the vocabulary of desert clans, and rainforest clans would not have had a word for the 'thorny devil lizard' or 'sand storm'.

## Comparing two indigenous languages

Look at the different words for hair, eye, kangaroo, galah and coolabah.

Yanyuwa language (coast of Gulf of Carpentaria)	Pitta Pitta language (Boulia area, inland far North Queensland)
 <b>naluwada</b>  <b>nalunyi</b>  <b>balinkama</b>  <b>mawalan</b>  <b>arinkili</b>	 <b>kuniri</b>  <b>miyi</b>  <b>kulipila</b>  <b>karaparri</b>  <b>kilanytyi</b>

- ☐ As a class, brainstorm places and natural features in your local area that have their original indigenous names, for example, Mount Tilga, Tullamarine. Write the names in the box. Use an atlas/online map to help you with the spelling.

### Brainstorm

- ☐ You are going to research the indigenous language or dialect in your local area using an online interactive map. The map can be accessed at: ► [www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/)

*The indigenous language or dialect of my local area is:*

\_\_\_\_\_

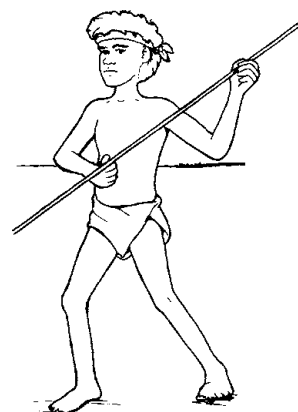
*Other indigenous languages and dialects in my state or territory are:*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- ☐ Use the resources from the interactive map in Task 2 to make a bilingual dictionary. Choose words from an indigenous language in your state or territory to write in the left-hand column (give it a title) then provide the matching English word.

►	English





1. The earliest Indigenous Australians living in the north of Australia shared a common language. Explain how different indigenous languages gradually developed over thousands of years in Australia.

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2. Why do you think it was useful for Indigenous Australians to be able to speak three or four other languages?

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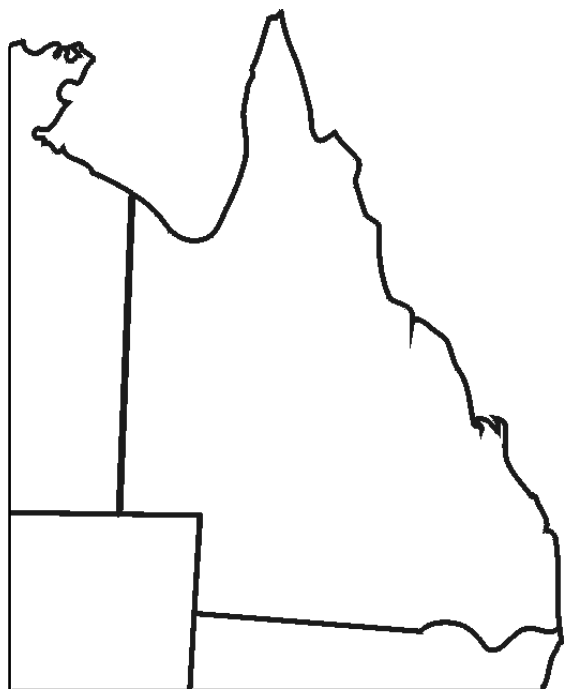
3. If two clans met and they did not speak a common language, what other methods could they use to communicate with each other?

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Look at the comparison of the Pitta Pitta and Yanyuwa languages on page 14. Use an atlas to locate Booroloola (the home of the Yanyuwa language) and Boulia (the home of the Pitta Pitta language). Mark the towns clearly on the map below.

Go to the interactive resource at ► [www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/) and find Boulia and Booroloola. Make a note on the map of neighbouring indigenous language groups. These languages were also probably understood and spoken by the Pitta Pitta and Yanyuwa people.



### Page 4

1. Answers could include: fishing in the lake / making camp fires / children playing games together / women cooking / making flour using a grindstone / making tools or musical instruments.

2. Suggested answers: a lake nearby for fresh water and fishing / trees for shade and to collect seeds / flowers and birds' eggs / plenty of dry wood and bark to make fires and artefacts.

Foods around the campsite

Foods gathered: honeycombs, birds' eggs, berries, wattle seeds, yams, lilies, mussels, moths, macadamia nuts, flowers, grubs.

Foods hunted: possums, frogs, pigeons, echidnas, wallabies, goannas, fish, cockatoos, ducks.

### Page 5

Suggested answers:

A. Carrying food / water / a baby.

B. Making fires / making music.

C. Trapping fish / making a small dam to store water.

D. Netting small reptiles / insects / fish.

### Page 9

1. A totem name is connected to the place where the family lives or an event close to the baby's birth.

2. The totem is not eaten and images of the totem appear on a person's artefacts.

People with the same totem share a special bond.

### Page 16

1. People moved to new locations and needed new words to describe their home and life, groups were separated and lost contact.

2. To maintain friendly relationships for trade and marriages.

3. Artwork, body language and gestures.