

## **WHO ARE WE? (CHAPTER 1)**

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate:

- the definition of culture and cultural identity
- the factors that contribute to and influence Indigenous personal, cultural and national identity
- the influence of social factors and experiences on Aboriginal identity
- the importance and interrelationship of land and spiritual identity
- the importance of kinship, and its place in Aboriginal communities today
- the ways in which contemporary Indigenous culture evolved.

## BACKGROUND MATERIAL AND INTERPRETATION FOR TEACHERS

### About the chapter

'Who Are We?' is an introduction to Indigenous identity and culture. All racial, ethnic and community groups have their own culture. This can include customary knowledge, values, beliefs and ways of living. These are kept alive and added to by individuals, and transmitted from one generation to another.

Peoples' understanding of their own identity is grounded in their cultural identity. It develops from birth and is shaped by the values and attitudes prevalent at home and in the surrounding community. This identity becomes more complex and fluid over time. It develops and changes as the belief systems and ways of life adapt under other cultural influences.

*Understanding others makes possible a better knowledge of oneself, any form of identity is complex. Individuals are defined in relation to other people — both individually and collectively — and the various groups to which they owe allegiance, in a constantly shifting pattern. UNESCO LEARNING: THE TREASURE WITHIN, 1996*

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identity

'Who Are We?' describes the factors that contribute to the cultural identity of Indigenous Australia and outlines how this identity is maintained. It includes the following:

- history and lived experiences
- kinship and community
- language
- tradition and spirituality
- health
- enduring connections to place
- external cultural influences.

### Evolution of Indigenous identity

Indigenous communities keep their cultural heritage alive by passing their knowledge, arts, rituals and performances from one generation to another: speaking and teaching languages; protecting cultural materials, sacred and significant sites, and objects; as well as adapting to, and adopting, contemporary cultural influences. One of the reasons Aboriginal cultures have survived for so long is their ability to adapt and change over time. Although culture is a dynamic and ever-evolving entity, Indigenous culture in particular has had to adapt swiftly to external influences. Colonisation has dramatically altered and challenged the cultural identity of Indigenous Australians.

'Who Are We?' identifies some of the factors that have affected the development of Aboriginal identity in post-invasion Australian society as:

- separation of families, including the Stolen Generations and removal of people from land
- imposed use of English and loss of Aboriginal languages

- economic factors
- the influence of religious groups.

'Who Are We?' also describes the changes that have occurred as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have fought to overcome injustice and reclaim their identity. In this process, Indigenous Australians are reclaiming their autonomy, as well as their right to construct and lay ownership to their identity through the revival of languages and traditions.

### **Diversity of Indigenous culture**

This section not only emphasises the dynamism of Indigenous Australian culture, but it also describes the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia. There are two distinct Indigenous cultural frameworks in Australia: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. There are some similarities but also differences between the cultures, languages and histories of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people. Additionally, there is much diversity of cultures within both societies.

Some of the factors that determine diversity of cultural expression include:

- geographic location
- history
- environment
- technological and generational differences
- the influence of social factors and experiences.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading the chapter 'Who Are We?' and completing the activities in these notes, students should be able to do the following:

- a) Describe the factors that contribute to a person's identity such as family and community, age and gender, life experiences, language, traditions, cultural mores and practices.
- b) Compare and contrast their own and others' sense of identity.
- c) Explain why not all Aboriginal people share the same identity and culture, and recognise the factors that determine diversity of cultural expressions and interpretations. These include geographical location and historical, environmental, technological and generational differences.
- d) Outline and explain ways in which Indigenous people maintain their identity.
- e) Identify the factors that have affected the development of Indigenous identity in post-invasion Australian society. These include separation of families, including the Stolen Generations, imposed use of English and loss of Aboriginal languages, and economic factors.
- f) Recognise the importance of Indigenous peoples' relationship to land and spiritual identity and investigate its form of expression.
- g) Investigate and report on how Indigenous people and their cultures have adapted, survived and, in some places, revived.
- h) Identify and explain the importance of families and communities to Indigenous people.
- i) Identify key aspects of Indigenous autonomy before invasion through:
  - conservation/preservation of the environment
  - sharing
  - trade
  - roles determined by knowledge and gender, like leadership.

## PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

### Teacher-led discussion

Before reading the chapter 'Who Are We?' students should discuss what they understand by the terms 'culture' and 'identity', and how culture shapes a person's identity. Preconceived ideas about Indigenous culture should also be discussed. What was Indigenous culture like before invasion? What about afterwards? What were some of the effects that colonisation may have had on culture?

### Teacher-led activity

Students should look at the 'Aboriginal Australia map' to gain an understanding of the diversity of Indigenous language groups within Australia. In a class discussion students choose several language groups and research them to see if the languages are still widely spoken today.

## QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION DURING THE READING

### Questions for class discussion during the reading

#### Our past

- How long have Indigenous Australians occupied Australia? What are the arguments and some of the evidence put forward by different sources?

#### What we are called

- What is an Aboriginal person? How does the word differ from Indigenous?
- What is a Torres Strait Islander?

#### What we call ourselves

- How do the people from the following areas refer to themselves? Note: There may be several names for cultural identity within these areas:
  - New South Wales/Victoria
  - Queensland
  - Tasmania
  - South-west Western Australia
  - South Australia
  - Northern Territory.

#### Living with our neighbours

- What evidence is there of contact with other nations before European contact?

#### Our societies

- What is the Dreaming? How does it differ from the European concept of dreams?
- Does your idea of 'family' differ from that held by many Indigenous Australians? In what ways?
- How does family affect identity, in your opinion?
- Does your family represent or reflect your culture?
- What is Link-up?
- Why are Elders important in Indigenous culture?
- What are some of the ways Indigenous people lived in and adapted to different environments?

- Why did communities move around so much?
- Why is fire so important?
- What traditional foods are mentioned in the chapter?

#### **Languages**

- Why did individuals need to speak several languages? How did it benefit them?
- How many Indigenous languages are spoken today? Why are there so few spoken fluently?
- What is Kriol? What is Yumplatok? How did these languages evolve?
- How have other languages influenced Indigenous languages? Can you give examples?
- What is being done to preserve or restore Indigenous languages?

#### **People, health and homes**

- What effect has colonisation had on Indigenous population and distribution?
- Why is it so difficult to obtain accurate population data?
- What are some of the benefits of moving back to, and living on, country?
- Do Indigenous Australians have a higher or lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians? Why?
- What are some of the factors that affect Indigenous health?
- In what ways was Indigenous housing suited to the Australian climate and different Australian environments? Think about lifestyle, climate, the structures used and the materials available.

## ACTIVITIES

### Activity 1

*The purpose of this activity is to give students an understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia. Through the investigation of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, students also learn about the effects of colonisation on Indigenous culture, and how Indigenous culture is being revived after colonisation.*

Students should re-read or revise the section 'What We Call Ourselves'. In the book, the following regional names for Indigenous Australians are listed: Koori, Murri, Bama, Palawa, Nunga and Nyoongars. Other names for Indigenous communities include Mulba, Yamitji, Yolngu, Anangu and Yuin.

Students are to research each of these names and describe where they are located in Australia, along with any other relevant information (e.g. Victorian Koorie (spelt Koori in NSW) languages include Yorta Yorta, from central and northern Victoria; Gunditjmarra, from the Warrnambool region; Ganai-Kurnai, from Gippsland; Wathaurung, from the Geelong area; and Wamba Wamba from Swan Hill.

**Note to teachers:** Terms that relate to language groups are preferred in many regions of Australia, compared to the over-arching 'Aboriginal' or 'Torres Strait Islander': **Murri** over most of south and central Queensland, **Bama** in north Queensland, **Nunga** in southern South Australia, **Nyoongah** around Perth, **Mulba** in the Pilbara region, **Wongi** in the Kalgoorlie region, **Yamitji** in the Murchison River region, **Yolngu** in Arnhem Land, **Anangu** in central Australia, and **Yuin** on the south coast of New South Wales. For a while people of Tasmanian Aborigines called themselves **Koories**, and then **Tasmanian Koories** to distinguish themselves from the mainland **Koories**. Recently, we have gathered evidence for the term **Muttonbird Koories**, a reference to the importance of mutton-birding to their traditional way of life, especially on the islands off the Tasmanian coast. More recently, the language term **Palawa** is increasingly being used. (Source: Australian National Dictionary Centre)

*In pairs or groups* students are to research the Palawa people of Tasmania.

**Note to teachers:** Colonisation effectively decimated the Palawa people. However, Palawa culture and lost language and traditions are being revived by Indigenous people in Tasmania through 'the revival of cultural traditions such as language projects, funerary practices, material culture, ceremonial activities and dance, and land management practises' (*The Companion to Tasmanian History* [http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/P/Palawa\\_Voice.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa_Voice.htm)). For more information on the way colonisation occurred in Tasmania (then Van Dieman's Land) you may also choose to research what's become known as 'The Black War' in Tasmania.

In a report or presentation, students should present their findings on the following:

- Palawa life and culture before colonisation
- Palawa life after colonisation, focusing on the impact of colonisation
- Palawa contemporary culture
- Palawa language
- The Lia Pootah people.

(If preferred, each group can research one of these aspects and then present their findings to the class). Students may like to present their information in the form of a pamphlet or brochure for tourists visiting Tasmania.

A range of references have been included here, but students should use discretion as to what they believe to be reliable source.

*The Companion to Tasmanian History*

<[www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/Images/Aborigines%20subject%20list.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/Images/Aborigines%20subject%20list.htm)>

*The Companion to Tasmanian History: Palawa voice,*

<[www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/P/Palawa%20Voice.htm)>

*The Companion to Tasmanian History: Tyerelore Culture,*

<[www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/T/Tyerelore.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/T/Tyerelore.htm)>

*The Companion to Tasmanian History: Palawa (Aboriginal) Languages,*

<[www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history/A/Aboriginal%20languages.htm](http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/A/Aboriginal%20languages.htm)>

Aboriginal Art Online: Tasmanian Aboriginal people and history,

<[www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/tasmania.php](http://www.aboriginalartonline.com/regions/tasmania.php)>

Found and Made in Tasmania: Aboriginal shell necklaces, <

<http://hosting.collectionsaustralia.net/foundmade/shells.html> >

Voice of the Land: 'Language of the Month' palawa Kani, <

<http://www.fatsilc.org.au/voice-of-the-land-magazine/vol-10-19-1999-2001/vol-13-december-1999/06-language-of-the-month-> >

TAFE Tasmania: palawa ~ Tasmanian Aborigines,

[http://learningedge.tafe.tas.edu.au/file/d802f724-9ea9-078a-5086-e21fc896d1ce/1/Mutton%20Birding%203/palawa\\_\\_tasmanian\\_aborigines.html](http://learningedge.tafe.tas.edu.au/file/d802f724-9ea9-078a-5086-e21fc896d1ce/1/Mutton%20Birding%203/palawa__tasmanian_aborigines.html)

The Home Page of Tasmania's Lia Pootah People: The Lia Pootah and Palawa People, <[www.tasmanianaboriginal.com.au/liapootah/whomakes.htm](http://www.tasmanianaboriginal.com.au/liapootah/whomakes.htm)>

Ryan, L 1981, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia.

Taylor, JA 2006, *A Study of the Palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) Place Names*, University of Tasmania, Launceston.

Taylor, JA 2003, 'The Aboriginal Discovery and Colonisation of Tasmania', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association*, 50 (4), pp 216–24

Lehman, G 2001, 'Turning Back the Clock: Fire, biodiversity, and Indigenous



community development in Tasmania', in R Baker, J Davies and E Young (eds), *Working on Country: Contemporary Indigenous management of Australia's lands and coastal regions*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 308–19.

Lehman, G 2000, 'Tamar the Kangaroo: A source of Palawa spirituality', S Kleinert, M Neale and R Bancroft (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp.32–35,38–39.

Taylor, R 1995, 'Savages or Saviours?: The Australian sealers and Aboriginal Tasmanian survival', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 66 (2000), pp. 73–84.

McPherson, K and Lore, T 2005, *The Genocide of Tasmania's Lia Pootah Aboriginal people: A living death*, Manuta Tunapee Puggaluggalia, Tasmania.

AIATSIS 2008, 'Cape Barren Island', *The Little Red Yellow Black Book: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra.

## **Activity 2**

*This activity demonstrates to students the importance and enduring connection that Indigenous individuals and communities have to the land.*

Using the links below, or through their own research, students find an Indigenous-run cultural centre or tour operator, or centres where Indigenous people are involved and control the way their culture is represented. They are to make notes on the history of the centre, where it is located, the programs or tours it offers, the people or community that run the centre, plus any other relevant information.

### **Victoria**

Brambuk National Park and Cultural Centre, <<http://www.brambuk.com.au/>>

Koorie Heritage Trust, <[www.koorieheritagetrust.com/](http://www.koorieheritagetrust.com/)>

Bangerang Cultural Centre, Shepparton, <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~bangercc/choice.html>>

Worn Gundidj Aboriginal cooperative, Tower Hill, <[www.worn Gundidj.org.au/](http://www.worn Gundidj.org.au/)>

Kirrit Barreet, Aboriginal Art and Cultural Centre, Ballarat, <<http://www.aboriginalballarat.com.au/>>

### **Queensland**

Tjapukai Cultural Centre, <<http://www.tjapukai.com.au> >

Dreamtime Cultural Centre, Rockhampton,

<<http://www.dreamtimecentre.com.au/home.htm>>

### **Torres Strait Islands**

The Gab Titui Cultural Centre, < <http://www.gabtitui.com.au/> >

### **Northern Territory**

Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, Casuarina, <<http://www.larrakia.com>>

Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre, Uluru, <[www.environment.gov.au/parks/uluru/visitor-activities/cultural-centre.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/uluru/visitor-activities/cultural-centre.html)>

Maningrida Arts and Cultural Centre, Maningrida, <<http://www.maningrida.com>>

### **NSW**

Muru Mittigar Centre, <<http://www.murumittigar.com.au/index.cfm>>

Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative, < <http://www.muurrbay.org.au/>>

Yarrawarra Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Corindi Beach, < <http://yarrawarra.org/>>

#### **WA**

Wardan Aboriginal Centre, Margaret River region, <<http://www.wardan.com.au/>>  
Nyinkka Nyunyu Cultural Centre, Tennant Creek, <<http://www.nyinkkanyunyu.com.au>>

#### **South Australia**

Tandanya Cultural Centre, Adelaide, <<http://www.tandanya.com.au/>>  
Iga Warta, Via Copley, <<http://www.igawarta.com/exper.html>>

#### **Tasmania**

Jahadi Indigenous Experiences, Delorane, <<http://www.jahadi.com.au>>

#### **PART A**

If possible, organise a class excursion to the centre, or to go on one of the tours offered by the centre.

Students should take note of what the guides or staff at the centre have to say about their land and their connection to the land. How do they feel about country?

Or

#### **PART B**

This could be an individual activity, or a group activity, where students research the cultural centres in each state and territory in Australia. The ones listed above are only a sample of the cultural centres in Australia (although they have easily accessible information on their websites). Students then compile their findings into a directory of Indigenous-run cultural centres and tour operators.

**Note to teachers:** It is important that students understand that Indigenous information is owned by Indigenous people. The information and images on the websites of Indigenous cultural centres have already been cleared for public exhibition, so there should be no problem with the pictures of deceased people being displayed when that's something their community might be distressed by, or information that's secret and sacred. Information about Dreaming stories should be taken down by the students as told, without elaboration or other interpretation.

#### **Activity 3**

*This activity explores the evolution and adaptation of Indigenous culture when faced with external influences. Kriol was originally an example of the effects of colonisation. However, Indigenous people have claimed ownership over the language and it is now a marker of identity.*

As a class, look at the Aboriginal language map (p. 25) to gain an idea of the number of different languages spoken throughout Australia. Discuss the impact of colonisation on Indigenous languages. Read the section 'Kriol and Yumplatok' in the book.

Distribute information about Kriol taken from the references below or have students research the evolution of Kriol in Australia and then discuss their findings as a group. How did Kriol evolve? How is it used today? How does it compare to Aboriginal English?

Have students look up the online Kriol dictionary found at [www1.aiatsis.gov.au/ASEDA/docs/0739-Kriol/index.1.html](http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/ASEDA/docs/0739-Kriol/index.1.html). (Once they have located site, have them print out the first page to have as a reference as they explore the dictionary).

Without looking at the left hand side of the screen, students browse the right side (English–Kriol Index). What words do they recognise? Once students have browsed the English–Kriol index, they can then begin to explore the etymology of some of the words they have seen.

#### *Extension activity*

Students are to write a short piece, answering the question: How has Kriol, a product of colonisation, come to be an important part of Indigenous identity?

**Note to teachers:** Kriol is an Australian creole language that developed out of the contact between European settlers and the Indigenous people in the northern regions of Australia. It bears a similarity to English but is recognised by linguists as a language in its own right because it is complex with a wide vocabulary and established rules and because people speak it as their first language (C Wiltshire, *Kriol Defined: Do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students learn English as a second language?*)

Kriol is a form of pidgin English which is spoken as a first language in northern areas of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and possibly in Queensland.

Kriol is recognised as being linguistically different from other creole languages (hence its distinct spelling). Although the majority of Kriol words are English, the structure, grammar, spelling and sound of Kriol are unique. Accordingly, Kriol is not readily understood by most English speakers. Source: The Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration, [www.aija.org.au/online/ICABenchbook/BenchbookChapter3.pdf](http://www.aija.org.au/online/ICABenchbook/BenchbookChapter3.pdf)

#### **Resources**

Rhydwen M 1993, 'Kriol: The creation of a written language and a tool of colonisation' in M Walsh and C Yallop (eds), *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra. pp. 155–68.

Harris J 1993, 'Losing and gaining a language: The story of Kriol in the Northern Territory' in

M Walsh and C Yallop (eds), *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, pp. 145–54.

Harris J 1991, 'Kriol: the Creation of a New Language' in S Romaine (ed.) *Language in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, pp. 195–203.