

Initiatives to improve the wellbeing of remote Indigenous communities

Australian Curriculum Content Descriptor

Humanities and Social Sciences/Year 10/Geography/Geographical Knowledge and Understanding/Geographies of human wellbeing/ACHGK081

Australian Curriculum Content Description

The role of international and national government and non-government organisations' initiatives in improving human wellbeing in Australia and other countries.

Australian Curriculum Elaboration

Identifying ways to improve the wellbeing of remote Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, including ways proposed by the communities.

Australians Together Learning Framework



The Wound



Our History



Why Me?



Our Cultures



My Response

Essential question

What are the best ways to improve the wellbeing of a community?

Introduction

Students learn the history and context of current wellbeing policies for remote Indigenous communities. With this knowledge, they research ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are proposing and implementing improvements that lead to improved health and social wellbeing.

This unit is related to the Australians Together resource on 'differences in wellbeing across Australia for Indigenous populations' (ACHGK080), which would ideally be done prior to this unit.

Teachers note that references to traditional or pre-colonial cultural practices regarding remote Indigenous communities should not be presented as more legitimate or authentic than contemporary cultural practices in Indigenous communities elsewhere in Australia.

Glossary

Terms that may need to be introduced to students prior to teaching the resource:

assimilation: the act of absorbing other people, cultures and ideas into a more dominant culture or society – to be made ‘similar’.

autonomy: the right to govern or control your own organisations or governments.

bureaucracy: onerous paperwork, report-writing and complex administration systems.

Centrelink: the current name for the government agency that distributes welfare payments.

colloquial: informal, everyday language rather than language used in official, written contexts.

frontier violence: the conflict, including massacres and retaliation, that occurred between invading Europeans and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples defending their Country. Frontier means ‘border’ or ‘edge’.

half-caste: relating to a person whose parents each come from different races. A term that government officials used in the past to categorise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by their ancestry. All are derogatory and highly offensive terms in contemporary society.

paternalism: the practice or policy of those in authority taking on a stereotypical father-figure role by restricting the freedom and responsibilities of people or communities under their control, falsely justified as being in their interest. From the Latin pater “father”.

Protection: the government policies introduced to try to reduce the impacts of colonial violence. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were under control of the ‘Protector’ in their area, who had responsibility for their welfare and control over their lives.


segregationist: relating to the separation of the races to prevent mixing, with different services and facilities for each.


subsistence: a way of living that involves depending on growing or harvesting your own food to eat; an economy with little or no money.



vociferous: forceful and loud, especially when expressing opinions. x


White Australia Policy: Australia’s first law after Federation in 1901. It was officially called the Immigration Restriction Act, but more generally known as the White Australia Policy. It ended in the 1970s with the adoption of policies of multiculturalism.

Western economic values: values that emphasise the importance of money, commerce and individual ownership of property.

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
 <p>The Wound</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on the issue</p>	<p><i>It’s a good idea to introduce students to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives at the beginning of a study so their views don’t become peripheral to the topic.</i></p> <p>There are significant issues and challenges regarding the health and social wellbeing of people in remote Indigenous communities. Remote Indigenous communities may have specific priorities and values which mean that measurements of wellbeing vary when compared to regional and urban communities and to non-Indigenous Australians.</p> <p>Remote communities face specific challenges due to the damage caused by their experience of colonisation, which has included extensive frontier violence, deprivation of rights under Protection policies, and part-payment for work in food rations and part held ‘in trust’ (in reality, the part held was never paid to the workers).</p>	<p>Class discussion</p> <p>Consider the term ‘Protection’ that was used for government policies relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 19th –20th centuries. Why was this word used? Who did Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be protected from?</p> <p>In what ways might Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities have been affected by the government stealing their wages? Consider short- and long-term effects.</p>

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
	<p>There are many differences of opinion within the Indigenous community about the best approach to supporting remote Indigenous communities. There are challenges in creating greater access to education and employment while recognising the right to continue practising customs that maintain deep connections to Country.</p> <p>In this Australians Together video (2:32), Ruth tells of her lived experience of stolen wages. Her story would give students a brief insight into the one of the many factors that's contributed to disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities: https://australianstogether.org.au/stories/stolen-wages/.</p>	<p>Short research and reflection task</p> <p>In pairs, explore the list of remote communities on the Australian Government's website https://www.indigenous.gov.au/communities/.</p> <p>Where are they mostly located? What is their average population?</p> <p>Propose a number of challenges that the remoteness and population size may pose. Share as a class.</p>
 <p>Our History</p> <p>A background to the issue</p>	<p><i>Below is a summary of the information on the student handout:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of colonisers trying to change colonised peoples' ways of life has a long history of 'false justification'. After the concept of 'racial superiority' became unpalatable, it transformed into 'paternalism', and later 'development'. • In Australia, paternalism was linked to assimilation and the idea that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people benefited from having their culture taken away. It was officially expected that Indigenous communities would eventually become extinct. • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote parts of Australia were subject to a range of violent and discriminatory practices. • During the global era of decolonisation (1950s–60s), international ideas influenced Indigenous activists. By the 1970s, the concept of Aboriginal autonomy became important. By the 1980s, governments were making concerted efforts to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making structures. Remote Indigenous communities were required to learn how to negotiate and organise with non-Indigenous outsiders. • Many remote Indigenous communities have specific areas of inequality, such as poorer health access, higher disease burdens and lower education and employment opportunities. • Internationally, initiatives to intervene in areas with poorer health and wellbeing sometimes continue traditions of paternalism and colonialism and can worsen outcomes. • In Australia, there's several challenges and differences of opinion as to how remote Indigenous citizens can be assisted to have higher wellbeing. • Several government policies or strategies implemented currently are particularly contentious, such as those that involve curtailing rights. 	<p>Short reflection task</p> <p>Colonisation and paternalism have occurred elsewhere in the world. Locate online the text for Rudyard Kipling's poem, The white man's burden. After reading it, write a reflection on your thoughts about the poem in relation to this topic.</p> <p>Class discussion/reflection topics</p> <p>How did the ideas of racial superiority shape various political movements throughout the 20th century? What were the outcomes in Europe and around the world?</p> <p>Why did ideas of racial superiority become unpopular in the mid-20th century? How did this have an impact on the European empires?</p> <p>What evidence is there that ideas of racial superiority are still very popular in some circles? How can this be addressed?</p> <p>Class debate topics</p> <p>In small groups, consider one to the policies listed at the end of the student handout. Each group should consider the likely positive and negative impacts on wellbeing of the policy. It is important to consider the responsibility of non-Indigenous people to learn Indigenous language.</p>

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
 <p>Why Me?</p> <p>Why am I learning this? What do I need to know to understand the issues?</p>	<p><i>This topic is a controversial one, with far more nuance and complexity than has been presented here. Using the copious amounts of online information, teachers can guide their students at a level appropriate to their classrooms. With the general background information on the student handout providing context, students can be encouraged to explore in more depth on an area or region that interests them.</i></p> <p>A good case study is the Northern Territory Intervention; the Commonwealth Government ‘emergency’ in 2007 that involved a forced, radical change to the way that remote communities were managed. The following resource from Australians Together provides a start to understanding the intervention from an Indigenous perspective: https://australiantogether.org.au/discover/the-wound/the-intervention/.</p> <p>There are also many critiques and reflections available online that discuss the ongoing consequences of the policy, such as https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2017/06/21/10-impacts-nt-intervention.</p> <p>More complex analyses might examine the Cape York Reform Agenda, an initiative of well-known Aboriginal leader Noel Pearson. The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme which ended with the Intervention was highly controversial at the time. The concept of hybrid economies is extensively written about in relation to remote communities. Building Stronger Futures is the current policy initiative, and there’s a lot about it on news media sites.</p> <p>There are also some policies targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally that may reference remote communities, such as the Healthy for Life program relating to maternal health and chronic disease.</p>	<p>Case-study project</p> <p>Choose an area of focus, such as housing; health; infant, maternal or paediatric health; mental health; education; language or any other aspect that influences wellbeing, and research it. You may want to focus on a particular region or community. Firstly, describe the current state of your chosen area of focus. Examine what initiatives or policies have been implemented by either governments or local organisations. Include an analysis of Indigenous perspectives. Finally, give your opinion on what could help improve this area of focus.</p> <p>Comparative analysis presentation</p> <p>Choose another settler colony (i.e. New Zealand, Canada or the United States of America) and compare their policies regarding wellbeing in remote Indigenous communities to Australia’s. Present your findings to the class.</p>
 <p>Our Cultures</p> <p>Are there any ways that more knowledge of Indigenous cultures can help broaden our understanding of this topic?</p>	<p><i>This resource asks teachers to consider Indigenous perspectives and opinions on the way that wider society has intervened to improve their wellbeing. One way that remote Indigenous citizens can traverse language differences to powerfully express their opinions is through artwork.</i></p> <p>Chapter 9 in the 2016 book <i>Engaging Indigenous economy: Debating diverse approaches</i>, published by ANU, contains several prescient paintings along with written explanations: http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p344543/pdf/ch092.pdf.</p> <p>Artist Jacky Green’s paintings and descriptions on pages 121 and 122 particularly demonstrate the power imbalances of meetings with government officials or mining company representatives. The following quotes are excerpts from the artist:</p> <p>“Aboriginal people sitting on the ground all focused on government and mining people standing with their whiteboard using complicated words. But we not really understanding, not getting our heads around what it really means.” (p. 122)</p> <p>“On the left of the painting is the whitefella bulldozer pushing over what he thinks is just a tree. But it’s not just a tree. It’s a sacred site tied in with the song lines that run through our country.” (p. 122)</p> <p>“This is what whitefellas do to us Aboriginal people, when they want to get us to agree to one of their development projects. They find the weak ones in our cultural groups. They look after them. They use them to sell their plans, and to tell us there will be jobs and good things from the development project, but there never is.” (p. 123)</p>	<p>Discussion topics</p> <p>How important is your language to your identity? If you were told you could never speak your first language ever again, what short- and long-term impacts might this have on you?</p> <p>Language research tasks</p> <p>Languages can tell us a lot about the priorities and values in a community. Find out how many languages are still spoken and how many are endangered. Is there a map available? Or could you create one?</p> <p>In small groups, research organisations that are working to preserve and share the languages. Present your findings to the class.</p> <p>Class debate</p> <p>Look into Aboriginal English and other creoles and consider their place within education teaching and learning. Should NAPLAN be given in Aboriginal languages or at least Aboriginal English?</p>

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	<p>This short clip (3:51) would be a good start for a discussion about the importance of language to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: https://aiatsis.gov.au/gallery/video/ngaiyurijja-ngunawal-language-group.</p> <p>Resources Sanders, W (ed) 2016, <i>Engaging Indigenous economy: Debating diverse approaches</i>, ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra. © The Australian National University. CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0 licence.</p>	<p>Comparative analysis task Choose two paintings by Indigenous citizens who live in a remote area that depict interactions between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at different times (i.e. past and contemporary). What message do each give? What are the similarities or differences in the messages?</p> <p>Artistic response Respond to one of Jacky Green's statements about one of his paintings in an artistic mode of your choice. How can you demonstrate your understanding of the impacts on wellbeing for Indigenous communities? How can you use spatial representations?</p>
 <p>My Response</p> <p>How does this lesson help us do our part to work towards justice and reconciliation?</p>	<p><i>This Key Idea concludes the unit and asks students to consider how they would reframe the situation in Australia to bring about justice and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. There are many ways to respond, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading and keeping up-to-date about things that are happening in remote Indigenous communities. For many non-Indigenous people in highly populated areas, remote Indigenous communities are out of sight, out of mind. So, when the government decides on a policy direction the community disagrees with, their views are easily ignored. • Writing to government representatives about your views if you find out about a direction or policy decision you disagree with. Encouraging others to do the same. • Supporting the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the media by sharing with others. • Engage with organisations that are doing great work in remote communities and volunteer. One example is NASCA: https://nasca.org.au/. But there's heaps of others out there. 	<p>Short research task Conduct an examination of Indigenous-controlled health services. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) website contains statistical data.</p> <p>Classroom display task Create a classroom display that prioritises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' views about remote Indigenous community wellbeing policies. Consider connection to Culture, Country and Community.</p>
<p>Other resources</p>	<p>The AIHW's annual overview report on Australia's health is a rich source of information. This chapter discusses the proportion of Indigenous controlled health services, see Figure 6.5.1: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/australias-health-2016/contents/preventing-ill-health.</p>	

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