

Connection to Country in Indigenous-authored texts

Australian Curriculum Links

English/Year 8/Literature/Literature and Context ACELT1806

Australian Curriculum Content Description

Explore the interconnectedness of Country/Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors.

Australian Curriculum Elaboration

Explaining how individual interpretations of these aspects are influenced by students' own knowledge, values and cultural assumptions.

Australians Together Learning Framework



The Wound



Our History



Why Me?



Our Cultures



My Response

Essential question

How do different cultures see and relate to the land they live on?

Introduction

In this resource, students are given a history of the relationships and experiences that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have had with writing and reading since European colonisation began. This helps gain a context from which to understand the genre of text written by First Nations people. Students examine the differences between how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Europeans view land. To illustrate how our culture can influence how we write a text, and our perception of texts as readers/viewers/listeners, European and Indigenous concepts of land and Country are explained and compared. Students will use this information to help them analyse an Indigenous-authored text with more depth and understanding.

Glossary

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

ancestral connection: a connection to the people in your family who lived long ago; to your ancestors.

civilise: when one group seeks to make another more like their own.

colonisation: when one country takes over another, the period of time during the takeover is called colonisation.

Europeans/British/convicts: various terms used to describe Europeans who came to live in Australia.

genre: a style, category or grouping of texts that share a common theme.

gold rush: a time in Australia's history, starting in 1851, where many people arrived from overseas to search for gold in the ground.

inferior: to be thought of as lower quality or a lower status than others.

landlord: a person who owns a house, building, farm or other piece of land and rents it out to make money.


pictographs: are a form of symbols (like an icon) used to resemble a physical object. They are different to hieroglyphs, where pictures are used to represent an alphabet or set of sounds.


Renaissance: a period of time in Europe from the 1400s to the 1600s that had many new technologies and new approaches to art, science and exploration.



squatters and selectors: in the early colonial period of Australia, European farmers were able to claim land as squatters or receive free land as selectors.


theories of evolution: theories about how organisms, including plants, animals and people change over time depending on their environment.

wariness: a feeling of suspicion or mistrust.

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
 The Wound Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on the issue	<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>When examining texts from the genre of Indigenous literature and film scripts, it's important to understand the history of the relationship between the First Peoples and the idea of writing and literacy.</p> <p>In traditional Indigenous cultures, knowledge and stories are remembered ('recorded') and shared using word-of-mouth. This is called an oral tradition. When it's necessary to write or draw messages or stories, this is done using pictographs.</p> <p>In Europe from the time of the Renaissance, the idea developed amongst scholars and experts that societies around the world who didn't have a system of writing or literacy were backwards or primitive, and at an earlier stage of development to them. This meant that these cultures could not be considered as sophisticated or intelligent as literate societies, particularly European societies.</p> <p>When European scientists developed theories of evolution and began to order humans from superior to inferior, this further reinforced their belief that Europeans were the most advanced humans on the planet.</p> <p>When the British landed in Australia, they brought with them these ideas. As they observed the Aboriginal communities around the Sydney area, they saw that they had systems for obtaining food, but they know about the oral systems of lore, culture and knowledge. They didn't understand the important relationship Indigenous societies had with Country.</p>	<p>Short research and reflection task</p> <p>The first known Aboriginal-authored text is a letter by Bennelong, narrated to a European scribe. The letter can be viewed on the National Library of Australia website: https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-557679852/view.</p> <p>Read the transcript at http://www.fnawn.com.au/the-bennelong-letter-voice-of-a-wangal-diplomat/ and make five observations about Bennelong as a person and his experiences.</p> <p>Share your thoughts with your class.</p> <p>Class brainstorm and research task</p> <p>Write down all of the texts you've encountered that are about First Nation people, culture and history. Then conduct research to find out how many of them are authored by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.</p> <p>Write a summary discussing your findings.</p>

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
	<p>The British believed that they needed to civilise Aboriginal Peoples, and later the Torres Strait Islander Peoples when they were colonised in the 1870s. Teaching First Nations people how to read and write was a central part of this 'civilising process'.</p> <p>Children were taken in the early years to be 'educated', to learn to read and write. So, from the first years of colonisation, Aboriginal People began to author texts. Throughout the next century, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples used the English written language to campaign for control over their lives and for their Country. Their writings included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hundreds of letters and petitions. • Writing to each other and to European friends and supporters. • Assisting with translations of the Bible. • Community newspapers. • Political documents. • Reading and publishing views in newspapers (van Toorn 2006 pp. 2–3). <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples didn't really have 'spare time' to read or write down novels and stories. The first known published Aboriginal author was David Unaipon in 1929, who's picture is celebrated on the Australian 50-dollar note.</p> <p>Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have had a living culture since before colonisation, and are the oldest storytellers in the world, they've been treated by Europeans as if they've no history of literature or storytelling. In the first years of colonisation, many First Nations communities developed a wariness towards books and writing. Some Indigenous cultures referred to Europeans in their own languages as 'paper people' or 'paper culture' (van Toorn 2006 p. 226).</p>	<p>Investigative task</p> <p>Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers. Choose one and write a short profile about them, books they've written and their background. See if you can find a quote where the writer talks about any challenges they've come across as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander author.</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"> • Our 'cultural context' influences how we write and how we read, watch and listen to texts. • Land is a useful idea for which to compare the concept of 'cultural baggage'. • Non-Indigenous people tend to view land as private property, to live on or to make profit from. • First Nation people view of land is different; land does not belong to people, rather, people belong to land. Sometimes these are described as connections to Country. • Understanding the concept of Indigenous connection to Country allows a deeper understanding of texts that are authored by First Nations people. 	<p>Analytical task</p> <p>Watch 'This land is mine!' from the 1992 film <i>Far and away</i> (03:29): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WULhkipzltU. Discuss how a Native American would feel after watching the clip.</p> <p>Write a short perspective from each of the following: the poor Irishman, the rich Irishman, and the Native-American tribe who owned the land.</p> <p>Personal reflection</p> <p>What's your favourite literary genre?</p> <p>How does your own culture, values and knowledge affect how much you like it?</p> <p>Do you know people who dislike or don't understand this genre? What are the reasons for their feelings about it?</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>Teachers are encouraged to use the information on the student handout to engage in a more in-depth examination that reflects the location, specific interests and academic levels of their students. Some ideas are provided here.</i></p> <p>The information in the handout provides an introduction and a basis from which to examine Indigenous-authored texts. Teachers can research and select any texts that they feel convey an Indigenous connection to Country for their student cohort.</p> <p>Poems are a good place to start. Spiritual song of the Aborigine by Hyllus Maris is a good one for analysis. Other renowned poets are Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Mudrooroo, and their works are easy to source. Song lyrics written by performers such as Kev Carmody, Archie Roach and Bart Willoughby work well for poetry analysis.</p> <p>There are many other types of texts that are authored by First Nations people which are useful for examining connections to Country. Speeches may be particularly potent; short films, fiction and non-fiction books and short stories.</p> <p>Newspaper articles and opinion pieces can also provide ideal examples for exploration and analysis. For example, Stan Grant's story about his family's connection to a creek on Wiradjuri Country is a powerful piece of writing: https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2015/oct/12/at-poisoned-waterhole-creek-i-tell-my-son-about-the-slaughter-of-our-people.</p>	<p>Literary analysis task</p> <p>Examine a text in detail and use it to answer three of the questions at the end of the student handout.</p> <p>Comparative analysis task</p> <p>Find an Indigenous-authored poem or song and compare it to the concept of land in the Australian national anthem. Make five observations in dot points.</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>Teachers and students will benefit from exploring how stories and messages were created and communicated in traditional Indigenous society. Most stories were told orally, sometimes with drawings or paintings to support the meaning. Pictograph symbols were often used to pass messages, using message sticks.</i></p> <p>Today, many Indigenous artists use paintings to tell a story. Often common symbols are used which make the meanings easier for non-Indigenous Australians to comprehend, although symbols that are specific to a particular part of Australia may differ.</p> <p>Find a painting or a group of paintings that tell stories in a way that's easy for your students to understand. Historically, stories have been passed down orally from one generation to the next. Since the mid-1900s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have been using the written word and literature to keep stories alive and pass on knowledge about Country.</p> <p>There have been some challenges when writing down traditional Indigenous stories. For example, when translated into written form, some meaning has been lost as there are not always suitable English words with the same meaning. This can result in changes to the original meaning or intent of the stories.</p> <p>Family groups and communities can have different versions or slight variations of stories that can also account for subtle changes over time.</p>	<p>Research task</p> <p>Find online, save and examine a list of commonly used Indigenous symbols. Then look for an Indigenous painting that contains some of these symbols.</p> <p>Research task</p> <p>Learn about how dictionaries are being created to record and preserve Indigenous language. Explore the website of the Australian Society of Indigenous Languages.</p> <p>Choose one of the languages that have online dictionaries and examine it carefully. Make three observations about how this language is structured differently to English or another language you speak.</p>

	Teacher guidance	Ideas for student activities
 <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"> • Looking for Indigenous-authored texts to read, view or listen to. • Paying for Indigenous-authored texts so to support authors. • Thinking critically about how your own cultural baggage influences how you perceive texts authored by people from a different culture to your own. 	<p>Classroom display activity</p> <p>Read, watch or listen to an Indigenous-authored text.</p> <p>Create a poster reviewing and/or recommending it to your classmates and put it up on a wall for others to read.</p> <p>Community engagement activity</p> <p>Invite an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander author to your school to talk about their work and experiences. Pay for their time in coming to speak to you.</p>
<p>Other resources</p>	<p>Australians Together resources that may be useful:</p> <p>A description of Indigenous spirituality by Uncle Graham Paulson explains the concept of interconnectedness: http://www.australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/aboriginal-spirituality.</p> <p>Understanding the connection to Country can be incorporated into a classroom activity so to gain deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of Country: https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/the-importance-of-land/.</p> <p>Information in this resource that relates to early Aboriginal colonial texts is sourced from Penny van Toorn’s detailed investigation of how European ‘paper culture’ influenced and affected Indigenous communities and authors.</p>	
<p>References</p>	<p>van Toorn, P 2006, <i>Writing never arrives naked: Early Aboriginal cultures of writing in Australia</i>, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra</p>	

For the Australian Curriculum content descriptions and elaborations, © Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) 2010 to present, unless otherwise indicated. The Australian Curriculum material was downloaded (accessed 28/01/20) and was not modified. The material is licensed under CC BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>). For further information, see our terms of use here <https://australianstogether.org.au/terms-and-conditions>.