



Noongar cultural and natural resource practices 1 : uses of the balka (grass tree)



Lesson one in a series of four lessons, focusing on Aboriginal people's cultural practices, past and present, based on principles of sustainability.

- **Noongar cultural and natural resource practices 1: uses of the balka (grass tree)**
- Noongar cultural and natural resource practices 2: resin collection
- Noongar cultural and natural resource practices 3: comparison with other Aboriginal groups
- Noongar cultural and natural resource practices 4: sustainable land use

CURRICULUM INFORMATION

PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT

Early Childhood	Middle Childhood	Early Adolescence	Late Adolescence
			✓

MAJOR LEARNING AREAS

The Arts	English	H & PE	LOTE	Mathematics	Science	S & E	T & E
			✓		✓	✓ ✓	

VALUES

Pursuit of knowledge & commitment to achievement of potential	Self acceptance & respect of self	Respect & concern for others & their rights	Social & civic responsibility	Environmental responsibility
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

DISTRICT

This lesson has been developed by teachers in the following district:
Warren Blackwood

TOPIC INFORMATION

PURPOSE

To give students opportunities to:

- gain appreciation and increased knowledge of Aboriginal Culture, and respect and acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- view people as united with nature rather than separate from it, and where people have responsibility for maintaining the natural order, rather than trying to dominate or change their environment; and
- move towards understanding the many uses of the balka (grass tree) as an example of careful resource management of Noongar people of south-west Western Australia.





STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students:

- identify information needed (and when), locate and obtain it from a range of sources, and evaluate, use and share it with others;
- select, use and adapt technologies;
- move towards understanding their cultural, geographic and historical contexts, and gaining the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in life in Australia;
- interact with people and cultures other than their own to help equip them to contribute to the global community;
- demonstrate self-motivation and confidence in their approach to learning;
- work individually and collaboratively; and
- recognise that everyone has a right to feel valued and be safe, and, in this regard, to understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly.

KEY BACKGROUND POINTS

Understandings – Aboriginal Perspectives Across the Curriculum

People are seen as united with nature rather than separate from it, and therefore have responsibility for maintaining the natural order of things, rather than trying to dominate or change their environment.

Sustainability

Aboriginal people's cultural practices, both past and present, are based on principles of sustainability. They have much to contribute to Australian society's efforts to widen sustainable practices with our environment and resources.

Heterogeneity

Aboriginal peoples vary in their cultural practices and outlook on life.

Adaptability

Aboriginal cultures are not static but evolving and adapting.

Aboriginal Involvement in Planning and Development

Teachers are encouraged to discuss lesson with school's AIEOs, Aboriginal Education Advisory Council members, and Aboriginal parents/carers to find out how local flora and fauna is and was used in your area. Should your school not have an AIEO or if parents/carers are unavailable, please contact the Aboriginal Education Team in the District Education Office.

The Battye Library and Department of Indigenous Affairs are also other sources of information.

CULTURAL & PROTOCOL CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers are advised to choose terminology carefully, and to ensure instruction is free from stereotypical generalisations and paternalistic statements.

Appropriate terminology

- When referring to Aboriginal people, use the term, 'Aboriginal person' and/or the local group name, e. g. Wandandi. The following examples are not acceptable:
 - Aborigine or Aborigines
 - ATSI
 - Ab or Abo
 - blackfellas
 - TIs or Thursday Islanders for Torres Strait Islanders – use full name.
- When referring to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, there is no part or half 'measurement'. Such descriptions are not acceptable. The 'skin classification system' is a livestock breeding practice developed in Queensland in the early 1800s and does not apply to people. Should an individual identify as being 'part', it is their individual preference and must not be used as a general term for other Aboriginal people.

Human Rights Commission and Commonwealth Government Definition

- The Commonwealth definition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is someone:
... *identified, recognised and accepted as an Aboriginal person in their local Aboriginal community.*





Correct Grammar

- In terms like: ‘Aboriginal people’ or ‘Noongar people’ – proper nouns require capital letters.

Local Groups

- When referring to local Aboriginal people identify groups by name, e. g. in the Warren Blackwood District groups identify as Noongar people, but some also have local group names, like Wandandi.

Value Statements

- Avoid ‘value’ loaded statements, such as:
 - ‘*This is what past or real Aboriginal people did*’. This implies that current Aboriginal people are not real or are less Aboriginal than their ancestors.
 - ‘*Today’s/modern Aboriginal people do not do this*’. This statement is misleading as many Aboriginal people maintain traditional cultural practices.
 - ‘*Bush medicine doesn’t work*’. This statement is dismissive and trivialises cultural practices. In addition, this statement fosters and reinforces racism.

Contemporary Issues

Teachers are encouraged to emphasise issues affecting contemporary people, such as:

- Colonisation exposed Aboriginal people to diseases which had a major impact on their health, and population numbers. Diseases and viruses such as smallpox and measles devastated Aboriginal communities causing numerous fatalities that often wiped out entire families. These diseases not only impacted on individuals but also the structure and lifestyle of Aboriginal people as a whole.
- Colonists’ lifestyle was geographically fixed while Aboriginal people were typically nomadic. Imposing a fixed lifestyle created spiritual, cultural and physical problems for Aboriginal people who were removed from their traditional homelands and forced into reserves and missions. Lack of regular exercise, processed foods, high sugars and carbohydrates affected fitness and health of Aboriginal families and communities. As a result, many Aboriginal people today suffer from diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, renal failure and heart disease.
- Today, processed and commercial products are substituted for bush foods not readily available, e. g. commercial honey replaces bush honey. To understand differences it helps to compare forms of herbs like fresh basil in summer and dried/processed basil in winter; or damper made from processed white flour instead of ground roots.

Further information and advice

Should you require further information or clarification, please contact the AIEO in your school, Aboriginal parents/carers, or the Aboriginal Education Team in the Warren Blackwood District Office on 9771 7100.

RESOURCES

Medium	Author, producer, developer etc	Title	Source
book	Dorling Kindersley	<i>Encyclopedia of People</i> (2003)	DEO resource centre
book	Alexander, B & C	<i>Threatened Cultures - Inuit</i> (1992)	DEO resource centre
articles	“The Environment, The Earth” resource lift-out in <i>The West Australian</i> , March 5, 2005	“Aboriginal Ties Make Difference”, “The Mix is Vital”, and lessons from Indigenous interaction with the land.	<i>The West Australian</i> , March 5, 2005 or the DEO





TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

TEACHING RESOURCES

- references and video listed above, and others relevant items you and/or students collect
- video player for class viewing
- computers and internet access for research
- writing materials

LESSON STEPS

These steps may be used in one lesson or further developed to cover a series of lessons.

Preparation:

- **Consult and collaborate** with your AIEO, Aboriginal staff, parents/carers, Aboriginal Community Consultants, or the Aboriginal Education team at the District Education Office to learn about local bush medicine.
- **Plan** your lessons with your AIEO, other Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal parents/carers or the Aboriginal Education Team in the District Education Office.
- **Invite** one of the above who has knowledge of balkas to co-teach your lesson.
- **Collect** resources including reference materials.
- **Read** information about balkas and Noongars from references, and other sources.

Implementation

Whole class

- **Explain** to students what you plan to do in lesson/series.
- **Write** balka (Noongar name) or grass tree – *Xanthorrhoea preissii* (Latin name) on board.
- **Brainstorm** what students know about the balka.
- **Discuss** other Aboriginal groups usage of flora/fauna in their regions (to research later).

Working in small groups

- **Divide** students into groups and explain they will research the balka tree and its uses by Noongars in the Warren Blackwood region. You may choose to allocate different aspects/questions for each group to research, or ask groups to research all aspects ...
- **Ask** students to plan how to record their findings – provide guidelines about how they should record information (notes, maps, diagrams, pictures ...).
- **Explain** that groups will make an oral presentation of their research findings to the class – provide guidelines.
- **Write** on board aspects you want them to investigate, such as (and add others):
 - Balkas' environmental role (What other foliage/flora relies on balkas?);
 - Past Noongar usage of balkas for practical purposes;
 - Current Noongar usage of balkas for practical purposes;
 - Past Noongar usage of balkas for cultural (ceremonial) purposes;
 - Current Noongar usage of balkas for cultural (ceremonial) purposes;
 - Why do Noongar people use balkas for so many things? What is the cultural significance of balkas?
 - How does the use of balkas contribute to maintaining the natural order, rather than trying to dominate or change the environment ...
- **Ask** students to complete the research using your collection of resources, the internet, library ...





Whole class

- **Report** back, explaining findings and presenting information to class.
- **Encourage** discussion and questions from audience.
- **Encourage** constructive feedback about presentations.

Further lessons may include:

- visit to nearby national park/forest;
- talk about balkas by local elder;
- local elder to supervise an activity using balkas ...

ASSESSMENT

Observe students' participation in class discussions, group work, and presentations to assess aspects like:

- Does the student understand Noongar usage of balkas?
- Does the student understand the cultural significance of balkas to Noongar people?
- What are balkas' traditional and contemporary uses?
- Was there any environmental impact? Do other flora rely on balkas?
- Does the student understand that Aboriginal people make the most of the resources they have?
- Use of internet for research, computer skills ...
- Group-work skills ...

Acknowledgements / Thanks to contributors.

Warren Blackwood District acknowledges and thanks Ms Tammie Dodd from Busselton; Mr Ken Ninnette from CALM, Busselton; and members of the Aboriginal Education Council for their valuable contribution.

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Produced by DUIT Multimedia for the Aboriginal Perspectives across the Curriculum program.

