

AXE 8

UNIT 25

SHORT CUT

ABORIGINAL DREAMS AUSTRALIAN LANDS

*Why are land, memory and stories
one and the same for Aboriginals?*



YOUR PROJECT

Take part in an Aboriginal art workshop to create a Dreamtime painting of an Australian landscape. Then, imagine the story behind the painting. 🗣

Au menu de cette unité :

DÉCOUVERTES CULTURELLES

- 👉 Le rapport des Aborigènes à leur terre
- 👉 La mémorisation par la transmission orale
- 👉 Les Dreamtime stories et leur lien avec le territoire

OUTIL LINGUISTIQUE

- 👉 Les marqueurs spatio-temporels

BEFORE CLASS!

Flash to watch!

Watch the video.

Be ready to talk about it in class!



● When the Land is the People

How do Aborigines memorise the stories and pass them on?

1 Passing on knowledge

A. Groupwork. Choose one of the texts. Pick out the memorisation techniques used by the Aborigines to pass on knowledge and elements about their perception of the land and about their culture and social structure.

B. Share your findings with the class and explain in your own words how they pass on knowledge.

C. Is the picture a good illustration of the texts? Justify your answer.



Text 1

Imagine a beginning, when man and woman first named the world. A "Songline" or "Dreaming Track" in the Australian outback¹ can still be walked, perhaps by the Arrernte or Pintupi or other Aboriginal peoples, and for them, it is nothing less than creation, the world sung into existence² by naming all plants and animals and the landscape itself. Reaching back at least 40,000 years, a singer can find his or her way along the ancient path of one of the "Ancestors" retracing a Lizard Dreaming, or a Kangaroo Dreaming, or a Rain-Maker Dreaming, refreshing existence and "singing up the land".

¹ the rural areas of inland Australia • ² sing a song that gives birth to the world

David Vann, , 2010

Text 2

How did they do it? Researcher Lynne Kelly was drawn to this question while investigating Aboriginal knowledge about animals for her PhD¹. It was evident to Kelly that Aboriginal people catalogued huge scores of information about animals – including species types, physical features, behaviour, links to food and plants – and she wondered how they do it. Aboriginal elders² explained to her how they encode knowledge in song, dance, story and place. This led to a theory that may revolutionise archaeology. It has long been known that the human brain has evolved to associate memory with place, referred to as the method of loci. This means that we associate memory with a location. How often do memories come flooding³ back to us when we visit our childhood haunt⁴? *Loci* (Latin for "place"), can refer to landscape features, ceremonial sites, abstract designs – anything with distinct features where information can be linked to memory.

¹ a doctorate degree • ² (ici) sages • ³ (ici) être envahi par les souvenirs • ⁴ (ici) lieu cher à son enfance

Duane Hamacher, 2016 © Australian Geographic

Text 3

"Say I'm a man from central Australia, my father teaches me stories about my country," Reid said.

"My sister's children, my nephews and nieces, are explicitly tasked¹ with the kin-based² responsibility for ensuring I know those stories properly. They take those responsibilities seriously. At any given point in time my father is telling the stories to me and his grandkids are checking. Three generations are hearing the story at once... that's a kind of scaffolding³ that can keep stories true.

¹⁰ "When you have three generations constantly in the know, and tasked with checking as a cultural responsibility, that creates the kind of mechanism that could explain why [Indigenous Australians] seem to have done something that hasn't been achieved elsewhere in the world: telling stories for 10,000 years."

¹ assigned a task to do • ² based on family ties
• ³ échafaudage

Joshua Robertson, , 2015

YouR TURN! 2 Test your memory skills!

A. Groupwork. Test the Aboriginal techniques of memorisation. Your teacher will give you a story from the Dreamtime on [Worksheet n°64](#).

B. Memorise your story and pass it on to another group, then learn theirs.

C. Tell the story you have learnt out loud without making mistakes.

Connected with the Land

What can Aborigines teach us about their land?

1 The Land and its people

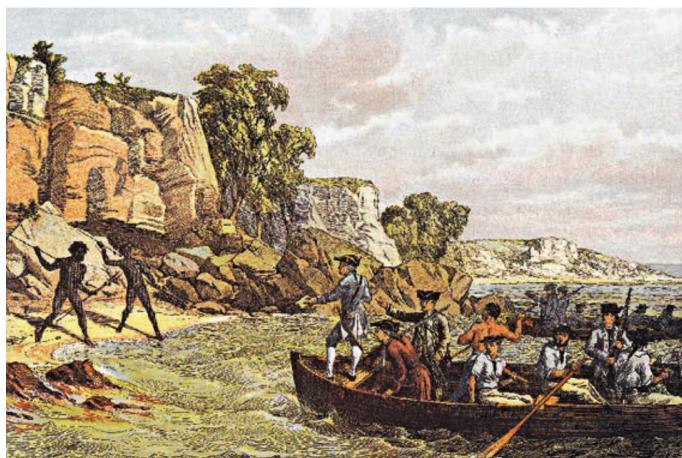
A. Groupwork. Read the text.

Group A: pick out events to write a quick chronology of Australian history. Are historians comfortable with the history of Aborigines? Why (not)? Justify with the text.

Group B: pick out the details that surprised the first

Europeans who settled there. What elements in this extract explain why Australia has such a unique environment?

B. Share your findings with the class and recap the story in your own words.



Captain Cook landing at Botany Bay in 1770,
Town & Country, 1872

At some undetermined point in the great immensity of its past – perhaps 45,000 years ago, perhaps 60,000, but certainly before there were modern humans in the Americas or Europe – it was quietly invaded by 5 a deeply inscrutable¹ people, the Aborigines, who have no clearly evident racial or linguistic kinship² to their neighbors in the region, and whose presence in Australia can only be explained by positing³ that they invented and mastered ocean-going craft⁴ at least 30,000 years in 10 advance of anyone else, in order to undertake an exodus, then forgot or abandoned nearly all that they had learned and scarcely⁵ ever bothered⁶ with the open sea again.

It is an accomplishment so singular and extraordinary, so uncomfortable with scrutiny, that most histories breeze 15 over it⁷ in a paragraph or two, then move on to the second, more explicable invasion—the one that begins with the

arrival of Captain James Cook and his doughty⁸ little ship HMS Endeavour in Botany Bay in 1770. Never mind that Captain Cook didn't discover Australia and that he wasn't 20 even yet a captain at the time of his visit. For most people, including most Australians, this is where the story begins.

The world those first Englishmen found was famously inverted – its seasons back to front, its constellations upside down – and unlike anything any of them had 25 seen before even in the near latitudes of the Pacific. Its creatures seemed to have evolved as if they had misread the manual. The most characteristic of them didn't run or lop⁹ or canter¹⁰, but bounced¹¹ across the landscape, like dropped balls. The continent teemed¹² with unlikely life. It contained a fish that could climb trees; a fox that flew (it was actually a very large bat); crustaceans so large 30 that a grown man could climb inside their shells.

In short, there was no place in the world like it. There still isn't. Eighty percent of all that lives in Australia, plant and 35 animal, exists nowhere else. More than this, it exists in an abundance that seems incompatible with the harshness of the environment. Australia is the driest, flattest, hottest, most desiccated, infertile, and climatically aggressive of all the inhabited continents.

¹ impénétrable • ² part of a family • ³ to postulate •
⁴ how to float on the sea • ⁵ rarement • ⁶ (ici) s'intéresser •
⁷ survoler • ⁸ brave • ⁹ courir en bondissant • ¹⁰ petit galop
• ¹¹ rebondir • ¹² be full of

Down Under,
Bill Bryson, 2000





Frog Hunter: Damien Wurrkidj, Matthew Abbott (Australian photographer), 2011

2 Living off the land

- A. Look at the photograph and describe it.
- B. What does the landscape tell you about Damien?
- C. How would you describe the expression captured in Abbott's portrait of Damien?
- D. Read the artist's statement about this picture. How does the portrait represent "the independence Aboriginal kids have"?

I have spent the last three years photographing in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. Late one afternoon on a walk around Injalak billabong¹ at Gunbalanya, I came across Damien with his friends hunting frogs. They had ingeniously contrived² a blowpipe³ and darts from a hose⁴ and other bits and pieces. According to Damien, frogs make the best bait⁵ for catching catfish. I like this portrait because it exemplifies the independence Aboriginal kids have and their skill at hunting using whatever's at hand.

1 pool • 2 make • 3 sarbacane • 4 tuyau d'arrosoage •
5 food to attract fish

Matthew Abbott, National Portrait Gallery, 2012

3 The Elder speaks of the land

- A. Watch the video and take notes.
- B. Present Uncle Max, his work and his goal.
- C. Why do other Australians attend this elder's workshop?
- D. **Have your say.** Would you like to attend Uncle Max's workshop? Justify your answer.

VIDEO N°49

