

# Yubulyawan Dreaming Project Education Guide (version 3.2)

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## Ngamanda! Welcome!

This is an education guide to the Yubulyawan Dreaming Project (YDP) website ([www.ydproject.com](http://www.ydproject.com)). The Yubulyawan Dreaming Project YDP is dedicated to documenting and sharing the wonderful cultural heritage and wisdom of Yidumduma Bill Harney, senior Australian Aboriginal Elder of the Yubulyawan clan of the Wardaman people. The Elder has directed the collection of all material and approved all material shown on this site. Wardaman country runs from Katherine in a wide swathe southwest to the Victoria River in Australia's Northern Territory.

## How this guide is organized

The key ideas are explained in order and each is illustrated through hyperlinks to the YDP, other websites and readily available electronic or printed books. Each key idea can be taught through the associated lesson ideas. A comprehensive list of Australian Curriculum elements relevant to teaching the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority* in school-years Transition to Year 10 is given on pages 4-5 ('Transition' is the name of the first full school year students undertake. It transitions them from Preschool to Year 1). The particular elements of the Australian Curriculum addressed by each lesson idea are given there also. The page format of this *Guide* is landscape so that it fits computer screens.

## Warning

The materials collected or referred to in this guide or on the website may contain the names or images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons.

## Copyright

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# Connecting to the Australian Curriculum

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority

This cross-curriculum priority has the following *Organising Ideas*:

	Code	Organising Idea
Country/Place	OI.1	Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups, Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
	OI.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place throughout all of Australia
	OI.3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have unique belief systems and are spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways
Culture	OI.4	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups
	OI.5	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing
	OI.6	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years and experiences can be viewed through historical, social and political lenses
People	OI.7	The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia
	OI.8	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated family and kinship structures
	OI.9	Australia acknowledges the significant contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people locally and globally

## Methodology

The methodology to determine relevance of elements of the main Australian Curriculum entailed extracting into Microsoft Excel all the Transition to Year 10 *Content Descriptions* of the English, History, Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business, Geography and Science Australian Curricula as they stood in November 2014. Excel proved an effective tool for sorting and sieving out just those *Content Descriptions* relevant to the *Organising Ideas* of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures* cross-curriculum priority. After three rounds of sieving 37 *Content Descriptions* were extracted. These 37 *Content Descriptions* are listed below

## Relevant Content Descriptions of the main Australian Curriculum

These are relevant to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority (at Nov 2014). Relevant *Lesson Ideas* (LI) given in this Guide are listed in the right-most column.

Curriculum	Element	Sub-element	Year	Content Description (CD)	CD Number	Lesson ideas (LI)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20				
English	Language	Expressing and developing ideas	1	Compare different kinds of images in narrative and informative texts and discuss how they contribute to meaning (ACELA1453)	ACELA1453		X	X																			X			
			9	Analyse and explain the use of symbols, icons and myth in still and moving images and how these augment meaning (ACELA1560)	ACELA1560		X	X		X																				
		Language variation and change	2	Understand that spoken, visual and written forms of language are different modes of communication with different features and their use varies according to the audience, purpose, context and cultural background (ACELA1460)	ACELA1460		X	X																						
	Literature	Creating literature	3	Create imaginative texts based on characters, settings and events from students' own and other cultures using visual features, for example perspective, distance and angle (ACELT1601)	ACELT1601		X	X		X																				
			Literature and context	4	Make connections between the ways different authors may represent similar storylines, ideas and relationships (ACELT1602)	ACELT1602						X																	X	
			6	Make connections between students' own experiences and those of characters and events represented in texts drawn from different historical, social and cultural contexts (ACELT1613)	ACELT1613							X																	X	
		Examining literature	7	Recognise and analyse the ways that characterisation, events and settings are combined in narratives, and discuss the purposes and appeal of different approaches (ACELT1622)	ACELT1622		X	X		X																				
			9	Investigate and experiment with the use and effect of extended metaphor, metonymy, allegory, icons, myths and symbolism in texts, for example poetry, short films, graphic novels, and plays on similar themes (ACELT1637)	ACELT1637		X	X																						
		Responding to literature	9	Explore and reflect on personal understanding of the world and significant human experience gained from interpreting various representations of life matters in texts (ACELT1635)	ACELT1635		X	X			X																		X	
		Literature and context	8	Explore the interconnectedness of Country and Place, People, Identity and Culture in texts including those by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors (ACELT1806)	ACELT1806		X	X	X																					
Literacy	Texts in context	1	Respond to texts drawn from a range of cultures and experiences (ACELY1655)	ACELY1655		X	X						X	X																
		10	Analyse and evaluate how people, cultures, places, events, objects and concepts are represented in texts, including media texts, through language, structural and/or visual choices (ACELY1749)	ACELY1749		X	X																					X		
Civics and Citizenship	Knowledge and Understanding	Citizenship, diversity and identity	4	How a person's identity can be shaped by the different cultural, religious and/or social groups to which they may belong (ACHCK014)	ACHCK014						X	X	X	X																
			7	How Australia is a secular nation and a multi-faith society (ACHCK051)	ACHCK051		X	X	X		X	X										X					X			
			7	How groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, express their particular identities, how this influences their perceptions of others, and others' perception of them (ACHCK053)	ACHCK053						X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
			8	Judeo-Christian traditions of Australian society and religions practised in contemporary Australia (ACHCK065)	ACHCK065											X														
			8	Different perspectives about Australia's national identity, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and what it means to be Australian (ACHCK066)	ACHCK066		X	X	X		X	X																		X
	Skills	Communication and reflection	3	Reflect on their cultural identity and how it might be similar and different from others (ACHCS010)	ACHCS010		X	X	X		X	X																		
4	Reflect on their cultural identity and how it might be similar and different from others (ACHCS021)		ACHCS021		X	X	X		X	X																				
Geography	Knowledge and Understanding		T	The Countries/Places that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples belong to in the local area and why they are important to them (ACHGK003)	ACHGK003				X							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			
			2	The ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples maintain special connections to particular Country/Place (ACHGK011)	ACHGK011		X	X	X									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
			3	The many Countries/Places of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples throughout Australia (ACHGK015)	ACHGK015													X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
			3	The similarities and differences in individuals' and groups' feelings and perceptions about places, and how they influence views about the protection of these places (ACHGK018)	ACHGK018				X		X	X																		
			4	The custodial responsibility Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have for Country/Place, and how this influences their past and present views about the use of resources (ACHGK023)	ACHGK023				X									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
			6	The world's cultural diversity, including that of its indigenous peoples (ACHGK033)	ACHGK033								X																	
		Water in the world	7	The economic, cultural, spiritual and aesthetic value of water for people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and peoples of the Asia region (ACHGK041)	ACHGK041		X	X	X		X										X									
		Landforms and landscapes	8	The aesthetic, cultural and spiritual value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHGK049)	ACHGK049		X	X	X		X																			
		Environmental change and management	10	The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' approaches to custodial responsibility and environmental management in different regions of Australia (ACHGK072)	ACHGK072				X								X	X	X	X	X					X				

Curriculum	Element	Sub-element	Year	Content Description (CD)	CD Number	Lesson ideas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20		
History	Knowledge and Understanding	The past in the present	2	The importance today of an historical site of cultural or spiritual significance; for example, a community building, a landmark, a war memorial (ACHHK045)	ACHHK045		X	X	X		X																	
		Community and remembrance	3	The importance of Country and Place to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples who belong to a local area. (This is intended to be a local area study with a focus on one Language group; however, if information or sources are not readily available, another representative area may be studied) (ACHHK060)	ACHHK060		X	X	X		X											X	X	X	X			
		First contacts	4	The diversity of Australia's first peoples and the long and continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country/ Place (land, sea, waterways and skies) and the implications for their daily lives. (ACHHK077)	ACHHK077									X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
		Overview of the ancient world	7	The evidence for the emergence and establishment of ancient societies (including art, iconography, writing tools and pottery) (ACOKFH002)	ACOKFH002		X	X																				
	7		Key features of ancient societies (farming, trade, social classes, religion, rule of law) (ACOKFH003)	ACOKFH003		X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		
	Depth Study: Australia and Asia	Making a nation	9	The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ACDSEH020)	ACDSEH020							X	X									X				X		X
	Depth Study: Investigating the ancient past	Investigating the ancient past	7	The importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. (ACDSEH148)	ACDSEH148		X	X			X											X				X	X	
Depth Study: The globalising world	Popular culture (1945 – present)	10	Continuity and change in beliefs and values that have influenced the Australian way of life (ACDSEH149)	ACDSEH149						X											X				X		X	
Science	Science as a Human Endeavour	Nature and development of science	6	Important contributions to the advancement of science have been made by people from a range of cultures (ACSHE099)	ACSHE099																X		X		X			

# Aboriginal worldview - quick reference

**Country:** For Aboriginal people, country is place, home and identity.

**Dreaming:** The spiritual essence of the creation time. It is the time and the way in which the world as we know it today was created. In the Dreaming, the ancestral beings created and are alive in the country – all the landforms, waterways, plants, animals, including humans, which we see today. The Wardaman language word for this time and its results is 'Burrawaja'.

**Dreamtime:** Refers to the spiritual creation time for the Wardaman.

**Law:** The eternal rules for keeping the country and all it contains in good health. Every place, plant and animal, including humans, has rules for how that being should behave and be related to, and cared for, by other beings.

**Skin group:** A division of Aboriginal society determining how closely people are related by blood and wider ties, how they can behave toward each other, whom they can marry. The skin kinship system ensures that all parts of creation are cared for. Through the skin system, totems are distributed so that all places, plants and animals have human carers.

**Songline:** The route a Dreaming being took in its creative journey crossing land, water and sky. This route and memory of the creation events which happened at various places along it are recorded in songs. These songs are controlled and sung ceremonially today by the respective human custodians of the various places along the route.

**Totem:** For an Aboriginal person your totem is your Dreaming. It is your title to the land that you are responsible to care for in the Law. The Law gives each Aboriginal person a set of personal responsibilities, rights and affinities for certain parts of creation. These are their totems. Totems are inherited through family and clan connection. Totems are plants, animals, places and even natural phenomena such as fog. They can be as small as mosquitoes or as large as a waterhole and its surrounds.

# Introduction: Dreaming - Law - Country

These concepts are the core of Aboriginal worldviews. They are closely connected. The Dreaming brings the Law and Country into existence. The Law tells how to look after Country. Country is the land and everything in it including humans. The connections are so close that, in some contexts, 'Dreaming', 'Law' and 'Country' are used interchangeably.

This holism in Aboriginal worldviews is important.

*We linked in together, joined in, see...with the rock paintings and trees and the stars and everything all connected together." Bill Harney*

But that, though true, is not an easy way in for our students or we teachers. So, to understand the connections let us unpack one concept at a time.

## What is the Dreaming?

### Fundamentals

Aboriginal connections to country are deep. They are metaphysical. That is, those links go beyond anything physical or material. They are spiritual and religious. Those ties are certainly emotional. They are unique in the world today – very different from other cultures' ways of understanding self and country. Aboriginal connections to country are hard but not impossible for non-Aboriginal people to understand and honor.

To understand Aboriginal connections to country, the best place to start is the idea of 'the Dreaming'. The Dreaming is the first pillar of the Aboriginal worldview. In the Dreaming, ancestral beings emerged in a formless universe. They journeyed across the sea and earth giving both form and features. On those journeys they encountered other ancestral beings, sometimes battling, sometimes making children together,

sometimes cooperating together in other ways. At the end of their journeys the ancestral beings moved back into the earth, water or sky where they live now and forever. Sometimes in that process ancestral beings transformed into features we see today such as mountains, rocks, islands, waterholes, animals and birds. Landscape, seascape and starscape are the results of ancestral actions and transformation.

Essentially, the Dreaming is a dimension of reality. It is read through signs in the land, sea and stars. It is place-specific according to the particular routes of the ancestors and their adventures at particular sites. However, it is not time-specific. Past, present and future are all here now. In the words of W.E.H Stanner, the humane giant of an anthropologist and public intellectual of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century,

*'One cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhen'*

(Stanner, W.E.H. *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2010. p. 58)

And, in the words of Wardaman elder, Yidumduma Bill Harney, the Dreaming put everything in place, and is still with us,

*Now, where I am sitting here. This rock here, the Dreaming put it there, in the Dreamtime. And made a Songline all the way, from this country to the hill to hill ...*

[YDproject.com Story tab: The Dreaming video \(1:21 min\)](#)

*... the Spiritual People was in the country, in the cave, living... where we believe they still there today*

[YDproject.com Land tab: Changing Land 2 / Floods and Crocs video \(4:23 min\)](#)

The Aboriginal universe does not change with time unlike so many other things we think about – like getting older – in which change in our bodies happens over time. Aboriginal time is cyclical, marked by birth and death and daily and seasonal cycles.

At a certain point in the Wardaman Creation Story a young boy cut an ancestral dog's ear'. At that point everything - people, plants, animals, landscape, and sky - became fixed in the way the Dreaming still keeps it

today. In the quote below, Bill Harney describes the rock paintings as 'shadows' showing, silhouetting the entry, at that moment of change, where the ancestral beings went into the rocks where they live today,

Soon as that little boy split the dog's ears when the dog...sang out, it changed everything straightaway. ... the soft high mount changed to become a rock all of a sudden. Many footprints that the people left in the mud, they glued onto the mud, now they are in the rock today. As soon as that little boy split the dog's ears, when the dog sang out, all these people changed... to become all the different animals, all the birds... the shadow of all the Lightning People went into the walls of rock, and they are there today. We call that Buwarraja put them in there. The shadow went in here, these people change to become all the different animal at the same time, become birds, animals, kangaroos and... We call that Buwarraja put them in there right back from the beginning of the Creation. That's where they are now.

[YDproject.com Story tab: Creation Story 3 video \(2:35 min\)](#)

In Aboriginal worldviews the Ancestors continue to play an active role in sustaining what they created in a similar way that, for many Christians, God is responsible for creation originally and continues to play a daily role in sustaining it.

The Dreaming also holds the stories telling of the creation of the country and everything in it. These stories are often told in songs. The songs and the country crossed in an ancestral journey make a songline. In the stories and along the songlines the ancestors set down *The Law* for looking after this creation. The Law is not a modern type of legal notion but rather one of power, meaning and obligation. The Law holds the rules of life setting out the relations and responsibilities of all creation.

Aboriginal people are specially attached to particular Dreamings, that is, connected with certain ancestors and particular stories through the place and time of their birth. That is their totem. It is important to look after your totem, respect the part of the Law applying to it.

Yidumduma Bill Harney illustrates all these fundamentals in the Yubulyawan Project. For example, in the *Peaceful Dove Rockhole/Golorog-ya* video (8:09 min) under the *Land* tab Bill tells the story of Peaceful Dove ancestor digging a hole called Golorog-ya way out on an open plain where there was no water before. Peaceful Dove, Diamond Dove and Cockatoo ancestors then together 'sang' up water to fill the hole. The ancestors continue to sustain that waterhole. It never goes dry. 'Old Rainbow', the Rainbow Serpent Ancestor with power over rain, wet season and water, 'keeps feeding it'. Their creation work finished, these singing Ancestors then became the birds we see in the bush and also became the rocks which surround Golorog-ya today. Golorog-ya is Bill's mother's Dreaming and a women's sacred and ceremony place. It is alive with ancestral spirits. For Bill, at the same time as his mother is human, the rocks at Golorog-ya are 'my mother, all my sisters'.

Illustrating the idea of totems and individual Dreamings in the *Under the Stars* video ( min) under the *Stars* tab, Ernie Dingo and Bill Harney discuss the importance of totems and specific personal Dreamings.

Ernie: Because people also have totems.

Bill: Yes, each one, everyone.

Ernie: Yeah, and that's to protect everything within the environment.

Bill: The totem from all the different animals from the waterside right up to the tree. All the different ants, mosquitos, flies, right up to the stars, they're part of the totem ... and all the different rock. You know another one might say, 'Hey, 'and that's my dreaming, you can't touch it. ANotherone says, 'That's my Dreaming, don't bulldoze it.' It's part of their totem. And the white man reckon, 'Oh, that's only rock!' But the blackfella says, 'That's our dreaming!'

Ernie: Because it sort of maintains the identity.

Bill: Yes, yes.



Ernie: And if you take away that identity,  
take away that rock, you take away that identity.

Bill: Yes, you take away his Dreaming he most  
likely get sick too.

The Dreaming is a rich and interesting world. Explore it below.

## In a nutshell

The Dreaming:

- created the universe we see today
- is 'everywhen'
- carries culture in story and song
- lays down Law, in part as personal Dreamings
- gives each Aboriginal person a totem – a distinct set of personal responsibilities, rights and affinities under the Law

## Lesson ideas for the Dreaming

These lesson ideas (LI) are based on the premise that students will understand the Dreaming better if they get to know a particular Dreaming story in detail over a number of lessons. For the Wardaman the main Dreaming story is the creation story.

### Learning objectives:

In line with the Australian Curriculum, after three lessons, middle school students will:

understand:

- what the Dreaming is in Aboriginal culture broadly
- that the Wardaman Aboriginal tribe have their own Dreaming - 'Buwarraja'

be able to:

- give examples of Wardaman Buwarraja
- tell the Wardaman creation story
- describe the spiritual world from a Wardaman viewpoint (how the world came about and of what is it made.)

Note: the deeper the class goes, the more lessons will be needed but three lessons should cover the *Core Activity* and some *Reflection*.

### LI 1 Getting to know Burrawaja (the fundamental story)

Watch the [Creation Story 1 \(6:52 min\)](#) in the Yubulywan Dreaming Project *Story* tab and work through the following questions orally and/or in writing.

1. Who are the three main characters? What did each of them do in the story?
2. What could they each symbolize? Think of the part of the universe each lives in at the beginning of the story.
3. Is Old Rainbow really dead at the end of the story?

### LI 2 Getting to know Burrawaja (extended art activity)

Watch the [Creation Story 1, 2 & 3 \(6:52, 7:25, 2:35 min\)](#) in the Yubulywan Dreaming Project.

Also watch [Extended Creation Story 1 & 2 \(9:41, 3:14\)](#); [Creation Story and Flood \(4:36\)](#); [Wardaman Land / Laglan – Land \(3:38\)](#).

Print out *Who did What?* worksheets on A3 (attached below) and/or print out the *Story Card Set* (attached below).

4. Students work in pairs to fill in a *Who did What?* worksheet (red text is suggested entries to check against student responses – for really able students, maybe erase red text to make the student handout).

An easier alternative to that worksheet for students is ask them to arrange the *Story Card Set* in a way that retells the story.

Hint: Look at *Bill's Birds 1-3* videos on the [Birds and Insects](#) tab for the Wardaman names of the birds involved.

5. Also look at the book [Wardaman Plants and Animals](#) for Wardaman names of the birds and animals. Also look at [Wardaman Land / Laglan – Land \(3:38 min\)](#).

6. Each student is allocated a character/event from their *Who did What* worksheet or the *Story Card Set*
7. Each student draws a picture showing their character's role in the story.
8. The class arranges their drawings into a story (cartoon strip or poster style). Tell the story to someone who does not know it.

### LI 3 Peaceful Dove Rockhole: Golorog-ya

Creation stories can be just for specific places. Watch [Peaceful Dove Rockhole / Golorog-ya \(8:09 min\)](#) on the *Land* tab

1. In your own words, describe the importance of singing for this place.
2. Who made the water come to this place in the Dreaming?
3. Who keeps the water topped up?
4. To which human group is this place special? Why?
5. Why do you think Bill says nobody should take anything away from this place?
6. Research the diamond dove and the peaceful dove on the web. Look at [Bills Birds 1 \(8:04\)](#) to learn their calls.
7. What do you notice about their calls and the Wardaman name for this rockhole?

### LI 4 Other Ideas

1. Collage/paint a class mural of the story on a long strip of canvas.
2. Think of a meaningful name for your picture.

3. Make a crossword out of characters/events in the Wardaman creation story. Ask a classmate to complete it.

### LI 5 Reflection

1. In words, retell the story your class has created.
2. What happened when the boy split the dog's ear? How is this important to the world we see today?
3. What does the story tell you about the Wardaman people and how they see the world?

Who did what? (worksheet)

CHARACTER	TYPE OF BEING	COMES FROM/LIVES IN	ACTION 1	Action 2	Action 3
Gorrondolmi 'Old Rainbow'	Rainbow Snake	Water	Had water people children with Dungdung - who became all the different sea creatures	Was offended by Dungdung having land children (with Nardi). Said that all children should live in the water	Made a great flood to bring all the land children into the water
Dungdung	Frog Lady	Under the earth	Has land children with Nardi then water children with Gorrondolmi	Made women's Law	
Nardi	Sky-boss and Mimi				
Kangaroo					
Mardborronggo					
Marnden					

CHARACTER	TYPE OF BEING	COMES FROM/LIVES IN	ACTION 1	Action 2	Action 3
	Diver Duck the Shag				
	Willy Wagtail		Invented all stone tools - axes, scrapers, knives, spear points		
	Black-headed python				
	Water-python				
Jerrjerrman					
	Grasshopper				
Barnangga	Grey falcon				
Barnangga-ya	Mountain shaped like a spear point		Grey falcon spears Gorrondolmi from this mountain		

**Story Card Set** (print, cut-out, shuffle)

No creation	Lightning people make all the songs 'and everything' and named each thing	Nardi, being a mimi, helps the Lightning people avoid drowning by taking them down to hunt and gather food - then bringing them back to safety in a great dilly bag
Old Rainbow (Gorrondolmi – a snake spirit) and Dungdung (frog lady-spirit) make sea people	The noise of the songs wakes up Old Rainbow who wants all beings to be water beings	Willy Wagtail, who was then a Lightning person, and invented all stone tools, and made spear points, axes, scrapers, out of mud - sang to make some mud hard
Nardi (tall mimi & sky spirit) and Dungdung make Lightning people	Old Rainbow creates great flood so everybody will live in water	Willy Wagtail made a spear to kill Rainbow – to get rid of the water so the Lightning People won't be drowned

Willy Wagtail made a spear with flint tip and shaft out of mud and gave it to Old Lightning

Old Lightning threw it and hit Old Rainbow - cut him in half but didn't kill him

Old Rainbow got very annoyed and brought the water higher

Old Lightning said 'give the spear to Grey Falcon', who was then a human

Grey Falcon invented lots of songs and the shooting stars, carried fire and a boning tool

Grey Falcon sang that spear to go straight and kill Old rainbow

Grey Falcon threw the spear and chopped Old Rainbow's head off

Rainbows' head fell to the ground separated from the tail some distance away

The water ran back to sea level - where Rainbow made a big whirlpool with spiritual song

All the water is still down at sea-level today

The creation dog, Mardborrongo comes into the story

Mardborrongo disliked the Kangaroo people

Mardborrongo chased them from the desert to the sea - made a songline - one kangaroo got separated

The Lightning people watched that lonesome Kangaroo being chased

Kangaroo jumped through a hole to escape - hit the side on the way through – and made a loud noise

The noise of the scared kangaroo woke Marnden, an old mimi devil lady

Marnden sang the hole to make the wall it was in rise up so to stop Mardborrongo jumping through it

Marnden then rode Kangaroo up to another site



Willy Wagtail and Diver Duck the Shag, who also there making spears to kill Gorrondolmi when Kangaroo hit the wall, were frightened by the earth being shaken

Willy Wagtail sang a hunk of mud to make a strong prop while Diver Duck sang that ceiling of the hole to stay up

Willy Wagtail put that prop – a sort of supporting column in place to hold up the hole’s ceiling – it’s still there today

Meanwhile, Black Headed Python said to old Lightning - was worried about water running away on the formless earth when old Lightning sang it up

Python took two digging sticks, Milirri and Gumun, and made rivers and gorges - all over the world

The rivers and gorges were empty so old Lightning set himself to make rain

Grasshopper came along to help make rain - they sang together

Grasshopper’s song made the clouds move in a whirlwind - the clouds filled with moisture

Old Lightning threw a boomerang - hit the clouds with thunderous noise – a lot of rain fell

The rain stopped when the waterholes and rivers were full - Lightning and Python were pleased

Meanwhile, Jerrjerrman, the little Lightning boy, (he is the little Northern Fantail wren today), watched and followed the dog trail

Jerrjerrman found Mardborrongo, the creation dog, sleeping under a soft high mound

The dog appeared dead - maybe killed by the kangaroo

Jerrjerrman split Mardborrongo's ear to check

Mardborrongo sang out from surprise and pain

Mardborrongo's yell changed all the country straight away - the formless muddy land changed into formed rocks - and all the song-making humans into all the different plants, birds, insects and other animals you see today

The Lightning people went into the rock - you can see their outlines as shadows where they went in - Wardaman call those shadows 'paintings' but they are not paintings - Wardaman say Buwarraja put them in there

# What is the Law?

## Fundamentals

The second pillar of the Aboriginal worldview is the Law. What is the Law?

The Law was passed onto the people from the Ancestors in *Buwarraja*. It is in the land, the rock art, the engravings, the songs, stories, plants, birds, animals, insects, the people. The Law does not change with a change of government. It is set for all time in the land. The Law teaches caring and custodianship for all the natural world.

[www.ydproject.com: Law tab](http://www.ydproject.com: Law tab)

Along with their adventures and creative activity on their journeys, the Ancestors set down the Law for looking after this creation. This Law is not a modern type of legal framework established by humans to order their society in limited ways. Rather, it is a larger framework of much wider power, knowledge and obligation. The Law is what it sounds like: the rules of life, not just for keeping civil order, but for everything - all that began in the Dreaming. It sets out the moral, social, political, economic, scientific and ecological bodies of knowledge and codes of conduct - in short, the relations and responsibilities of all creation (not just humans) for all time.

All life, the land and the Law comes from the actions, stories and songs of the Ancestral Beings. The Law is learnt by each new generation through stories, songs, dance, art and through the way everyday activities are pursued – hunting and gathering, travelling, experimenting, thinking, problem solving, sitting and observing, and socialising. The Law keeps the world constant and right – spiritually and materially.

In the words of Paul Taylor, Director of the Yubulyawan Dreaming Project,

Using all the major art forms in theatrical ceremony. Aboriginal people sing, dance and paint the landscape: the plants, birds, animals, insects, rain, soils, everything is set to continue in abundance, with such ceremony. As Yidumduma [Bill Harney] constantly reminds us,

“We sing the land to make it happy.”

Ceremony is therefore very, very serious business for the Wardaman and Aboriginal people. It is survival. Acting out their Creation Story affirms their belief in the connectedness of all the natural world; and the sense of ‘happiness’ is not a ‘Nirvana’ of human self-centred narcissism, but an environmental joy within the Law passed on from the Great Spirit Ancestors in the Creation Time Burrawaja. This Law, passed on from the Ancestors to present day people in forms of art, song, dance, story, painting, was set in stone for all time in the multitude of magnificent art galleries that adorn Wardaman country and the whole continent. This Creation Story Law is fundamentally spiritual and theatrical: the ‘script’ of the play and its ceremonies re-enact the Dreamtime drama to reconnect the people to ancestral spirit – the essence of life being spirit with its building blocks of matter encompassing everything in the natural world.

The story rings through all traditional Wardaman cultural life. In the beginning everything was Spirit. The Spirit Ancestors gave birth to the land, the people, all living things: it was these three Great Ancestors, Gorrondolmi-Rain-Rainbow, Dungkung-Frog Lady, Nardi-Sky-Boss, whose two great marriages brought life to the world. Rainbow (Water) and Frog Lady (Earth) set the scene for Frog Lady (Earth) and Sky-boss (Sky) to have the fecund marriage that brought the first life onto the land. It is a naturally-observant imagination’s story, but its importance is that it helped develop an Aboriginal way of life in Wardaman country that was satisfying in personal terms and for community needs. In the Gujingga ceremonial Songline one hundred men sit in a line together. Giant boomerangs are beaten in a heart-beat rhythm to the song and dance. This rhythm sings the soil, the cosmic landscape of Dungkung the Earth Mother. Boomerang rattling intensifies: this puts the song up in the sky with Nardi.

According to Yidumduma, the intention here is to get the Spiritual connection between land and sky, thus marrying Dungdung and Nardi, to bring life and “happiness” to the land. The marriage ensures “we get the right amount of rain” with Rainbow, so the land will be abundant with life, for Wardaman to care for and nourish, and enjoy.

(p102 of *Four Circles* which in turn extracted from *Theatre in Culture*, 2009)

Wardaman elder, Bill Harney bears out Taylor’s words,

Here is the real Wardaman Land. The story that they used to tell me lots and lots, they used to tell me the story over and over.

[Growing Up Gornbun-ya Site \(2:57 min\) on the Intro tab](#)

Paul Taylor’s words are also echoed in more general terms for the whole of Aboriginal Australia by ANU historian, Bill Gammage,

The Dreaming has two rules: obey the Law, and leave the world as you found it— not better or worse ... but the same. The first rule enforces and exists for the second. Together they let place dominate time, and translate well understood ecological associations into social relations—kin, marriage, diplomacy, trade and so on. They apply the same relations and obligations to all creation, guarding the universe by outlawing fundamental change, so making all creatures conservationist and conservative. .... The Dreaming is comprehensive ... It gives and explains a role to every part of creation, and decrees [in Law] how each must act.

(Gammage 2012, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*. p.124)

The Law is comprehensive in that it applies to all creation, and it is complex in that every particular part of creation in every particular place has a part of the Law specifically for it. Each species of plant and animal follows its respective Law in doing what it characteristically does in its life cycle. If a plant fruits at a

particular time of year, that is Law for that plant.<sup>1</sup> It is the Law for termites to make didgeridoo.

Integral to its comprehensiveness and complexity, the Law applies to individual humans in different ways. As we saw in the Dreaming above, individual Aboriginal people are spiritually linked to particular sites and the Ancestors who travelled through them.

Crucial to this is the idea of balance. One of the functions of the skin kinship system is to ensure that all parts of creation are cared for. Through the skin system, totems are distributed so that all country plants and animals have carers. Everyone has a country and a group of human and non-human kin for whom to care. No plant or animal should go extinct. Every centimeter of land and sea, every plant and animal must have human carers.

Gammage, 2012 (ebook loc 2578 of 6050)

The balance can accommodate new influences, which, though hard to manage, are not alien. Camels, rabbits and Europeans were always in the Dreaming. It is just that they were hidden until their physical manifestations became evident because ‘... in the Dreaming all things had a place, so newcomers must be accommodated ...’.

Gammage 2012 (ebook loc 2578 of 6050)

Along with its comprehensiveness, complexity and particularity, it is also important to realise that the Law is not an open system of knowledge. As youth mature in Aboriginal society their teachers reveal further detail and powerful imagery in narratives and knowledge whose outlines they already know.

Illustrating what is meant by the Law, Bill Harney tells how Dungdung, the Frog Lady Ancestor, and one of her husbands, Nardi the Sky-Boss Ancestor, make women’s and men’s Law respectively

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<sup>1</sup> [Ngurra-kurlu: A way of working with Warlpiri people \(Desert Knowledge CRC Report No. 41\)](#). Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu (Steven Jampijinpa Patrick), Miles Holmes, (Lance) Alan Box, 2008, p16.

Everybody was singing and dancing and the old lady Dunggung took the girls out to a different place (from the boys), made all the woman's law, women's ceremony. Nardi was taking all the male out, teaching them about the male ceremony, song, the law, to understand, to pay attention, to recognize, caring for country... They showed them how to put it together. They said, "You have to have two separate laws, two strong law." "Women's Law have to be separate, no men go there." "Men's Law has to be separate, no women go there." They made another story with the song, all the men and women come together, that makes everybody happy. They made the song and the story where everybody has to trade... for marriages... when the children are born, grown up. "You have to follow your totem from your father"... "You follow a little bit from your mother" That's what they said.

[Story tab: Extended Creation Story 1 \(9:41 min\)](#)

For another description of distinct women's and men's Laws, see, <http://www.artbacknt.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Education-Kit-online.pdf> (p. 6)

It is not just people who have Law. For example, Bill Harney gives us the burial Law held by ants,

... the ants had designed the smoking and everything, the ants said, 'When anybody passed away, this is the way to go'. The ants people are the ones that made up all the rule about the burial. They said, 'You must bury people at the top of the forks of the tree, or down under the earth. You must leave them there to a certain year; it might be 2 or 3 years, until the bone dries out. Then you go over and have a special ceremony, dancing and that, make a big smoke when they pull the bones out of the

graveyard and put them inside of the paperbark (coffin)

[Law tab: Burial Law: Ants \(4:48 min\)](#)

A further example is the Law of the Wardaman ecological burning cycle established by the Little Bat,

You got to look after that part of your Dreaming. to every tree, everyone got Dreaming. That's what the "Caring" mean ... Looking after your country, Caring for Country. The Caring for Country, what they said, you burn off early, when everything cool, no leaf burn. You need to burn up straight after rain in April and May, ...

Them Little Bats, they're the two, the one that made it. Made it happen with a firestick. He made a firestick and then Yagjagula [a Lightning Brother] took over. The Yagjagula used the two flints, cracked it and lit the grass. Made a spark come up and he lit the grass Yagjagula. He's still there today ... the lightning burns you call them

[Law tab: Burning Off: Fire Law \(4:58 min\)](#)

Bill Harney's *Law Painting* is an example of Law in art. He painted two such works. One was bought by Sydney University and hangs in a prominent place in its Law Faculty. Bond University bought the other. The intricate detail in the paintings indicates the reach of the Law.

[Law tab: Law Painting \(1:33 min\)](#)

Skin relations are the complex Law applying to human interactions. The skin system determines how closely people are related in addition to biological blood ties, how they can behave toward each other, whom they can marry and the skin of their children.

[Law tab: Skin Relations and Kinship](#)

The Law comes with sanctions. Keeping the Law makes life predictable, safe and good to live. For example, properly introducing strangers to your country keeps them safe.

[Art+Soul \(Series 1\) – buy the video at this link](#) (Episode3: 19:00 – 20:42 min)

Also see: [Land tab Walking in: Gornbun-ya Site \(5:10 min\)](#),

[Law tab: Yingwana: Water Clearance \(4:20 min\)](#)

For art about keeping safe, look at Gija elder Rusty Peters' painting of ceremony for welcoming coming strangers according to the Law, [Wurrangga \(Smoke Dreaming\), 2008](#).

Breaking the law can bring individual punishment as, for example, in the ritualized spearing punishment for a mistaken-identity murder in the 2006 film of *Ten Canoes* directed by Rolf de Heer.

Breaking the Law can also bring sickness, calamity and death. In the link below, see the painting and read, especially from paragraph 15 on, about the connections made by the Gija people of the East Kimberley and the calamity of Cyclone Tracy. Is there anything similar in the Bible?

<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/june/1341900155/sophie-cunningham/knock-em-down-rain>

Bill Harney of the Wardaman people says that the calamity of climate change is a due to unlawful interference with the moon,

We saw the rocket going up to the moon.  
We said, 'Well, rocket has gone up to the moon, it'll bugger the whole world'. That's what we said. What that means...touching the moon, you shouldn't be interfering with the moon. That's when it changed, everything now, is climate change, today and all over. We are saying, 'We don't know what's going to happen'. There's a big pollution in the air, everything is going crazy in the country. It's the Spiritual turning everything over...

[Land tab: Changing Land 1 \(9:06 min\)](#)

## In a nutshell

The Law:

- was laid down by the Ancestors in the Dreaming
- is unchanging – it applies for all time
- sets out the moral, social, political, economic and ecological codes of conduct, relations and responsibilities of all Creation
- is kept by obeying rules of interaction and doing ceremony
- is not an open system of knowledge, yet it incorporates newcomers
- brings calamity if it is broken

## Lesson ideas for the Law

These activities are for middle school and older students, as the Law is a subtle concept. The deeper the class goes, the more lessons will be needed but three lessons should cover the *Core Activity* and some *Reflection*.

### Learning objectives:

In line with the Australian Curriculum, after three lessons, middle school students will:

understand:

- what the Law is in Aboriginal culture;
- where the Law comes from;
- what happens if the Law is obeyed/not obeyed;
- understand how Aboriginal Law differs from mainstream Law

be able to:

- give examples of Wardaman Law;
- connect Wardaman Law with ecology;
- connect Wardaman Law with social life.

### LI 6 Concept map

On an A3 sheet as an individual student or on a large poster as a class, start a concept map of Wardaman Law. Keep coming back and building on it as you learn more.

One idea is to set out circles for moral, social, political, economic, scientific and ecological and write down and paste in examples of Wardaman Law, which go in each circle.

### LI 7 Similarities and differences

Working through at the fundamentals listed above, what are the similarities and differences between Wardaman Law and other religious and secular law? To answer this question complete the table below:

(Hint: Before completing the table, students could watch all the videos on the [Law](#) tab.

**Compare Wardaman Law, other religious and secular law**

	Wardaman Law	..... religious law (choose a religion)	Secular Australian law
Who makes law?			
Does the law change? If yes, How? If no, why not?			
What areas of life does law cover? What are the limits of its scope?			
In what ways does a person obey/break the law?			
Can everybody know the law?			
What happens if the law is broken?			



## LI 8 Skin Law

Watch the *Nations, Clans and Family Groups, Moiety, Totems, Skin Names* videos on the [University of Sydney](#) site. More resources are available here. [Law tab: Skin Relations & Kinship](#)

Focus on to the particular [Wardaman skin system](#) by visiting to see how the skin cycle works in practice.

Here is a screenshot from the Yubulyawan Dreaming Project website:

- 1) Randomly distribute the skin names in the class according to random (male skins start with 'J'; female with 'N'):
- 2) Ask students: What skin is your father? Your mother? Your daughter? Your son?
- 3) If you are a woman, what skin is your granddaughter? Your grandmother?
- 4) If you are a man, what skin is your father? Your son?
- 5) Do a photo ritual with family groupings.

## LI 9 Initiation Law / men's and women's Law

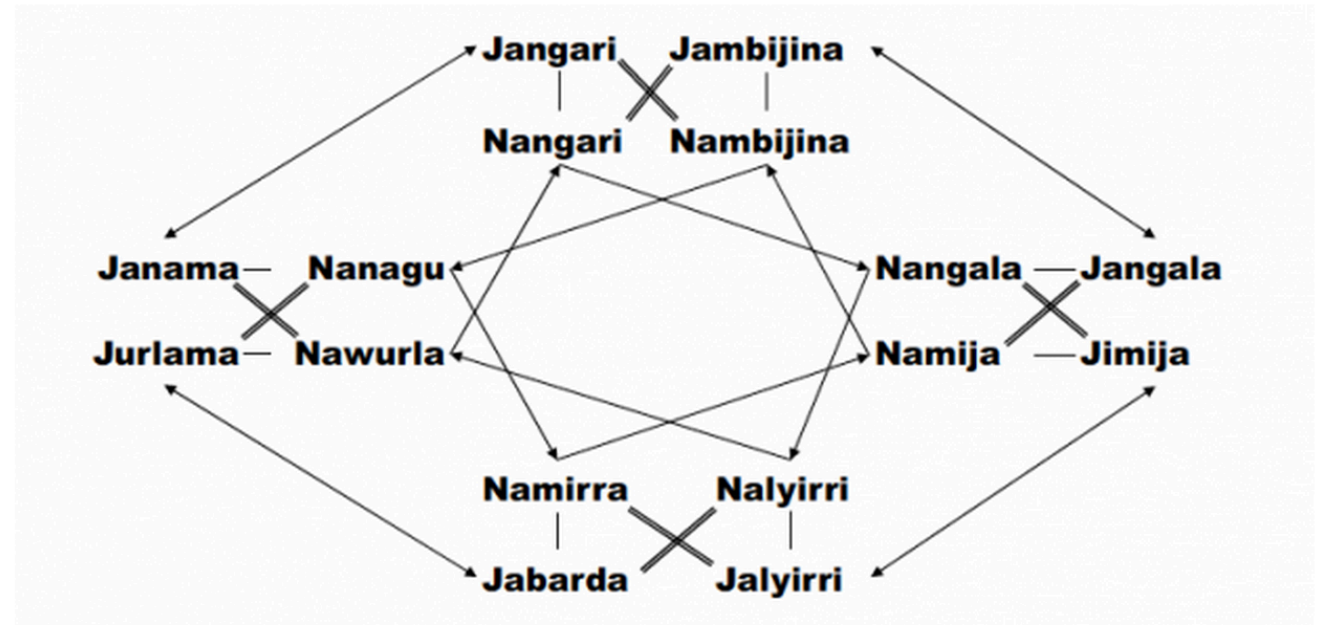
Watch the [Ochre and Initiation \(3:30 min\)](#) and [Yingwana/Water Clearance Ceremony \(4:20 min\)](#) videos on the *Law* tab.

- 1) What ceremony and education does a young man need to go through to be allowed to marry?

## Skin Relations

Courtesy of the former Katherine Language Centre, here is a skin relations chart with neighbouring *Ngarinyman* names. These are similar to *Gurindji/Warlpiri*. *Wardaman* are related but different. On this chart Js are male, Ns are female. Single lines are brother/sister. Double lines are husband/wife. Arrows are mother-to-daughter or father-to-son. There are many ways of drawing the chart, this is just one.

### Read More & Resources



- 2) Does the Water Clearance Ceremony remind you of any other religious ceremonies?
- 3) Look at [http://www.aboriginalculture.com.au/social\\_organisation.html](http://www.aboriginalculture.com.au/social_organisation.html)
- 4) Can you think of reasons why the Aboriginal mother-in-law rule could be a beneficial custom?

## LI 10 Burning off / fire Law / ecological Law

The Law is fundamentally ecological because, as Gammage (2012) indicates, the Law requires care of Creation.

The Dreaming taught why the world must be maintained; the land taught how. One made land care compulsory, the other made it rewarding. One was spiritual and universal, the other practical and local.

(Gammage 2012. location 2627 of 6050)

Care of Creation requires understanding how nature works. The Wardaman understand how nature works. The natural and the spiritual work together and are inseparable. You cannot have one without the other.

Ecology explains what happens, the Dreaming why it happens. Striving to learn how the world works is fundamental to life, for knowing is safety, comfort and power. People prize knowledge as Europeans prize wealth.

(Gammage 2012. Location 2521 of 6050)

Watch [Changing Land 1 \(9:06 min\)](#) on the *Intro* tab, [Changing Land 2 Floods and Crocs \(4:23 min\)](#) on the *Land* tab and [Burning Off/Fire Law \(4:58 min\)](#) on the *Law* tab.

1) In what ways do the Wardaman care for their land?

2) How could breaking ecological law bring calamity?

Give three examples in your answer.

## LI 11 Flying Fox Law

Watch the [Rainbow and Flying Fox \(4:10 min\)](#) video on the *Story* tab.

Using the information in the video, answer these questions:

- 1) What is the Law for the flying fox – for its daily routine?
- 2) Using your knowledge, the internet or other resources research and write down your findings on the question of whether the natural behavior of the flying fox is true to its Law?



## LI 12 Burial Law

- 1) Watch [Burial Law/Ants \(4:48 min\)](#) video on the *Law* tab.
- 2) Why would ants have responsibility for burial law?
- 3) Looking on the website <http://www.indigenoustralia.info/culture/mourning-ceremonies.html>, write down where a person goes after death.
- 4) As part of a funeral a deceased person's house may be 'smoked'. What is the purpose of such a smoking ceremony? Look at: <https://www.jcu.edu.au/australian-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-information/cultural-protocols-guide/respect/other-cultural-ceremonies>

## LI 13 Breaking the Law

Breaking the Law can bring sickness, calamity and death. In the link below, see the painting and read, especially from paragraph 15 on, about the connections made by the Gija people of the East Kimberley and the calamity of Cyclone Tracy. Gija country is 300 km southwest of Wardaman country.

<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2012/june/1341900155/sophie-cunningham/knock-em-down-rain>

Also watch [Law tab: Changing Land 2 Floods and Crocs \(4:23 min\)](#)

## LI 14 Going deeper

What lessons could mainstream Australia learn from Wardaman Law? (Hint: think about connectedness, conservation, ecology, ritual, ceremony)

# What is Country?

## Fundamentals

The third pillar of the Aboriginal worldview is country. What is country?

Dreaming-Law-Country are all indivisibly connected. One is not separable from the others. The **Dreaming** brings the **Law** and **Country** into existence. In the Dreaming, the Ancestral Beings created the country which is the land and everything in it including geological forms, water sources, plants, animals and people. The Ancestral Beings also handed down the Law. The Law tells how to look after country.

The Wardaman idea of country shares the important characteristics of all Aboriginal concepts of country. It is fundamentally about connections. These connections are deep. They are metaphysical. That is, those links go far beyond anything physical or material. They are spiritual and deeply emotional. They are unique in the world today – very different from other cultures' ways of understanding self and country.

Aboriginal connections to country are holistic. They interweave self, other people, society, economics, politics, history, nature, science and religion. Aboriginal culture has no Cartesian dualism – that split between the material and the mental/spiritual – which became foundational to mainstream Western worldviews following its articulation by the French philosopher Rene Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The contrasting holism of Aboriginal worldviews cannot be over-emphasized.

To illustrate, by neighbourhood parallel, the meaning of country in the Wardaman worldview, let us go just 300 km south of Wardaman country to hear from Warlpiri man, Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu of Lajamanu. Warlpiri people put country in the very centre. It is many things at once. In speaking of country, Wanta,

... uses two Warlpiri words: *ngurra* (home) and *walya* (the land). 'Home' is a better word for country because non-Aboriginal Australians relate to it in much the same way as the Warlpiri. Mainstream Australians can readily imagine home as being more than a house, or a block of land: it is also the family or friends who live there, the suburb or city it is located in, the activities to do there, the history, the pets, the experience of eating and relaxing together there, the celebrations, and so on.

<http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/DKCRC-Report-41-Ngurra-kurlu.pdf> (p18-19)

In the same spirit that non-Aboriginal people care for their home which in turn nurtures them, Wanta says, ,

That country was meant for you to look after it and it was meant to look after you.

Other Northern Territory Aboriginal voices echo this view,

When I am away from my country which I often am for travel, I very much want to get back. My country looks after me.

Resident of Ngukurr, NT (2012)

In the bush I can hear corroboree ... even in Sydney I can hear corroboree.

Resident of Lajamanu, NT (2012)

What does it mean to look after country? It is often said that Aboriginal people do not own country as much as their country owns them. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that particular Aboriginal people own specific tracts of country although that ownership is more custodial responsibility than property right. Ownership of country and ceremony derives from one's father or mother depending on the region. Ownership of country means responsibility for ensuring, through both ceremony and practical husbandry, that all the endemic flora and fauna of that country

maintain a healthy presence and balance. Ownership also means having the right and responsibility to say who can enter or use the resources of a certain tract of land or water or visit a sacred site, to say with whom the country is to be shared.

(Gammage 2012, p. 140).

Traditionally, Aboriginal people were entirely dependent on their country. However, sustainably managing the resources of country demanded detailed knowledge. As Deborah Bird-Rose writes,

The main technology for the organization of country is and was knowledge. Knowledge is country-specific, and virtually the whole body of knowledge for any given country is related to the generation of life in and around that country.

(quoted in Gammage p. 145-146)

The knowledge required is both spiritual and ecological.

## Ecology

Ecology is about how living things interact with each other and their environment, carving out within nature a niche within which they can flourish. In the Aboriginal view, the ecological and spiritual are closely connected. Animals and plants follow their habits for spiritual as well as ecological reasons. People must preserve the ecology for spiritual reasons. And the spiritual reasons closely describe the way the ecology works.

Here we reiterate what was quoted in the Law lessons by the historian Bill Gammage,

The Dreaming has two rules: obey the Law, and leave the world as you found it— not better or worse ... but the same. The first rule enforces and exists for the second. Together they let place dominate time, and translate well understood ecological associations into social relations—kin, marriage, diplomacy, trade and so on. They apply the same relations and obligations to all creation, guarding the universe by outlawing fundamental change, so making all creatures conservationist and conservative. ....  
The Dreaming is comprehensive ... It gives and explains a

role to every part of creation, and decrees [in Law] how each must act.

Gammage, 2012 (p. 124)

The Law is comprehensive in that it applies to all creation, and it is complex in that every particular part of creation in every particular place has a part of the Law specifically for it and giving its particular ecology. Each species of plant and animal follows its respective Law in doing what it characteristically does in its life cycle. If a plant fruits at a particular time of year, that is Law for that plant. As we saw in the Law section of this Guide, it is the Law for termites to make didgeridoo. The Law for the flying fox is to sleep during the day at its routine roost and fly off at dusk to feed overnight some kilometres away, returning to roost at dawn. It is the Law for ants to clean the bones of the dead.

The Dreaming of a plant, animal, person or location in the land gives the Law for it and its ecology. The Dreaming maps closely onto ecology. Dreaming stories are spiritual stories and metaphors for the interactions of nature and rules needed to protect it. As Gammage, succinctly points out, the Dreaming tells *why* country must be cared for. Country itself tells *how* to do it,

Ecology explains what happens, the Dreaming why it happens. Striving to learn how the world works is fundamental to life, for knowing is safety, comfort and power. People prize knowledge as Europeans prize wealth.

[Gammage 2012](#) (ebook location 2521 of 10807)

The Dreaming taught why the world must be maintained; the land taught how. One made land care compulsory, the other made it rewarding. One was spiritual and universal, the other practical and local. Songlines distributed land spiritually; 'country' distributed it geographically. Everyone had a country: narrowly defined, land, water and their sites and knowledge in the care of a family under its head. ... In their country a family saw an environment shaped in the Dreaming and thronged with sites and stories, witnessed the familiarity plants, creatures and elements had with particular localities, and thought itself part of these intimacies. Not only obvious features which Europeans name, but every pebble and ripple disclosed both the ecological logic of its existence and the Dreaming's presence. Here wallaby and wallaby ancestor live,

there nardoo and nardoo ancestor, there avenging fire killed lawbreakers, here a punishing flood reached. Totem site and ecological niche alike proved the need and reward in caring for country. Some places might not be touched for years, but not for a moment did carers forget them.

Gammage 2012 (read more at location 2627 of 10807)

Regarding ecology, in any culture's terms water is essential to all life forms including human. In the recent exploration of the planet Mars, the finding of water has been enormously significant in the search for life there. In the Aboriginal, and arguably other worldviews, it is intuitively right that water should be in the power of a major ancestral spirit connected to this watery seed of life.

Think back to the Wardaman Creation Story. In that story there are three original Ancestors – one water, one earth, one sky. Between them they make all things above, in and under the earth and water. *Gorrondolmi*, or *Old Rainbow*, as Bill Harney calls him, is the Rainbow Serpent. He is present in, and has power over, all forms of water – rain, storm, cyclone, river and sea. His children are the creatures of the water – fish, crabs, and even flying foxes because they always roost beside water. *Dungdung*, the frog lady, is the Earth Ancestor. It is true that many things cannot live in water, at least not all the time. She is right to insist that some creatures need to live on land – they cannot live in water. That really is the way the world is – not all creatures are the same.

Bill Gammage (2012, p. 124), says the Dreaming laid down a fundamental rule: obey the Law whose main function is to keep the world as you found it— not better or worse, but the same. The Law translates well understood ecology into social relations including kin, marriage, diplomacy, trade and so on.

Bill Gammage, and the ethnobiologist, Glenn Wightman, have each amassed extensive evidence indicating that Aboriginal ecological knowledge has been and remains extensive and finessed.

(for Gammage's work see: <http://www.amazon.com/The-Biggest-Estate-Earth-Aborigines/dp/174331132X>;

for Wightman's work see: <http://www.lrm.nt.gov.au/plants-and-animals/biocultural-knowledge/publications>)

Indicative of the importance and great extent of ecological knowledge amongst Aboriginal people, Gammage argues that before white contact resources were,

... as predictable as [European-style] farming, and in times of drought and flood ... more predictable. Mere sustainability was not enough. Abundance was normal. This was a tremendous advantage. It made plants easier to concentrate, to burn, to let fallow, to make park-like, to share. It made life comfortable. Like landowning gentry, people generally had plenty to eat, few hours of work a day, and much time for religion and recreation.

Three rules directed [pre-contact] management:

- Ensure that all life flourishes.
- Make plants and animals abundant, convenient and predictable.
- Think universal, act local.

These rules imposed a strict ecological discipline on every person.

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Biggest-Estate-Earth-Aborigines/dp/174331132X> (ebook Location 390)

The *Bush University* and *Birds & Insects* tabs of the Yubulyawan Dreaming Project website show the entwining of ecological knowledge and roles with Dreaming or spiritual knowledge and roles.

In the video *Traditional Knowledge for Sustainable Landscapes*, Bill Harney explains two of his paintings which illustrate much of what we have covered so far.

## Night Sky

Part of the country created in the Dreaming is the night sky. In the Dreaming, after their creation work is complete and everything becomes still ([Creation Story 3 \(2:35 min\)](#)) the Ancestral Beings take multiple forms, both going into the land or water and into the sky. In the sky the shadows of the Ancestors are stars and the major Ancestors, Nardi, Dungdung and Rainbow are also the dark spaces between stars. Old Emu is the dark space running the length of the Milky Way. See Before Galileo: [Star Law of Bill Harney \(6.47\)](#)

Other Ancestral Beings such as the sun and moon also feature in the Dreaming ([The First Astronomers 7:50 min](#)). The behaviour of the sun and the moon in the story mirror what really happens in space.

Google 'Aboriginal Astronomy' to go deeper on this topic. In particular for background knowledge, read astronomer [Ray Norris's 2016 Dawes Review No. 5 Aboriginal Astronomy and Navigation](#). This is a comprehensive survey of Aboriginal astronomy research as it is currently stands.

## Contact History

From the time when the first cattle and their drovers started coming through Wardaman country up to the early 1900's the Wardaman people waged an intermittent guerilla war to defend their country from encroaching white cattle grazers. However, after on the nearly two decades of fierce resistance the Wardaman ceased warfare and accepted the reality of white settlement. This meant accommodating to living and working seasonally on the cattle stations ([Lewis, D. A Wild Country. Monash University Publishing, 2012. pp. 198-219](#)). These times are marked in rock art in Wardaman country. See Whitefella Contact Story. (2.19 mins)

Years later, white authorities began to steal Aboriginal children who were of lighter skin often with a white father. These are the 'stolen generations'. See [Black Plum and Charcoal: Stolen Generation 5:51 min](#). The big picture is the history of contact between Aboriginal people and white settlers has been about who owns and controls country.

## In a nutshell

Country is:

- local land including plants, animals and geology
- night sky as well
- home
- spiritual and ecological
- central to Aboriginal peoples' lives
- that which looks after you and you look after it physically and spiritually
- contested with colonial settlers

# Lesson ideas for Country

## Learning objectives:

In line with the Australian Curriculum, after three lessons, middle school students will:

understand at a basic level:

- what Country means in Aboriginal culture
- what ‘caring for Country’ - responsibility for Country - entails
- inter-connections between *Dreaming*, *Law* and *Country* in the Wardaman worldview.

be able to:

- give examples of inter-connections between *Dreaming*, *Law* and *Country* in the Wardaman worldview
- give examples of Dreaming stories which carry ecological knowledge and instructions

## LI 15 Bush museum: the spiritual-ecological Wardaman world

Have the class create a museum with each student or group of students creating displays on different topics. Some suggested topics are:

- 1) various bird species of Wardaman country
- 2) red ants
- 3) termites
- 4) spinifex

- 5) pandanus
- 6) bush medicine
- 7) snakes of Wardaman country
- 8) land management with fire
- 9) various Wardaman sacred sites
- 10) Wardaman star knowledge
- 11) songlines

Have the students ‘visit’ the museum and answer a set of questions from what they learn from the displays. Some suggested questions are (students would need to somehow include answers to the questions in their displays:

- 1) How can do fish know that *Godjogodjog*, the bar-shouldered pigeon, is feeding them at the water’s surface? [Art tab: Paintings Talking Story \(3:19 min\)](#)
- 2) Describe the spiritual or Dreamtime cause of spinifex being able to catch fire when it is wet. [Art tab: Lightning Brothers / Nimji site \(2:51 min\)](#)
- 3) When did *Jorlbormman*, the pied butcher bird, get his song? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill’s Birds 1 \(8:04 min\)](#)
- 4) What does Bill say motivates *Jorrerrngman*, the rainbow bee-eater, to call out? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill’s Birds 1 \(8:04 min\)](#)
- 5) Why does *Jarnarran*, the little egret, make a choking noise? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill’s Birds 1 \(8:04 min\)](#)



- 6) What is unique about *Jorijorij*, the great bower bird's, call? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 7) What does Bill say *Garrgany*, the brown falcon, can tell you is going to happen? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 8) Which bird can land on a long blade of grass? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 9) Which bird tells you the wet season is coming? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 10) What is a signal that black plums are ripe? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 11) Describe one of the relationships between *Judiyina*, the tawny frogmouth, and *Jerregeg*, the barking owl. [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 2 \(7:39 min\)](#)
  - 12) Which bird sleeps all day? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 3 \(5:21 min\)](#)
  - 13) What animal does *Girragirraman*, the apostlebird (babbler), warn? [Birds and Insects tab: Bill's Birds 3 \(5:21 min\)](#)
  - 14) Learn the calls of one or more birds.
  - 15) Name three birds that are named after their call.
  - 16) What gives the black soil termite mound protection from rain? [Birds and Insects tab: Black Soil Termite \(8:09 min\)](#)
  - 17) How did the poisonous snakes get their poison? [Birds and Insects tab: Grasshopper 1 / Lidi & Nidban \(9:17 min\)](#)
  - 18) What are two uses for the *Yarirra* tree? [Bush University tab: Silver Fox or Smoke Tree: Yarirra \(3:53 min\)](#)
  - 19) How could you prepare bush medicine to help heal flesh lesions or initiation marks? [Bush University tab: Emu Apple / Barnarr \(8:02 min\)](#)
  - 20) Describe what 'caring for country' means in Wardaman culture. [Law tab: Burning Off / Fire Law \(4:58 min\)](#)
  - 21) Where are the old people at the place called *Mardbanga*? [Law tab: Yingwana / Water Clearance Ceremony \(4:20 min\)](#)
  - 22) In the [Law tab: Burning Off / Fire Law \(4:58 min\)](#), Bill says charcoal is 'one of the best to keep the water clean, really clean'. Look at [HowStuffWorks](#) and write down why charcoal can make a good filter?
  - 23) In [Land tab: Changing Land 2 Floods and Crocs \(4:23 min\)](#), how are 'the Spirituals' reacting to the way the country is being treated since white man came? Why are they reacting in these ways?
  - 24) When approaching particular places in the country, Bill Harney calls out to the Ancestors, the 'Spiritual People', the 'Old People', living in those places. Why does he do that? See [Land tab: Walking in / Gornbunya Site \(5:10 min\)](#); [Language tab: Talking To The Ancestors 1 \(2:26\) min](#) and [Talking to the Ancestors 2 \(1:47 min\)](#)
- [Further hints can be found in art about keeping safe, for example, in East Kimberley Gija elder, Rusty Peters', painting of ceremony for welcoming strangers according to the Law, [Wurrangga \(Smoke Dreaming\), 2008](#).

Also see how a Gija Serpent Ancestor, now residing as a rock bar in a river near Warmun in the East Kimberley, is approached in a respectful way by elder, Rammel Peters, to avoid bringing visitors to harm. ([Art+Soul. Series 1: Episode 3: 19:00 – 20:42 min](#))]

- 25) For what purpose does Bill talk to the 'Old People' in the [Law tab: Yingwana / Water Clearance Ceremony \(4:20 min\)](#) video?
- 26) What is the major difference between what makes up Aboriginal compared with non-Aboriginal constellations? [Stars tab: Before Galileo \(6:47 min\)](#)
- 27) Name some Wardaman Spiritual Ancestors who are now in the sky. [Stars tab](#)
- 28) Describe the features of the sky which identify one Spiritual Ancestor. [Stars tab: Under the Stars \(4:58 min\)](#)
- 29) How can Aboriginal people in a number of places across Australia tell from the night sky that it is the season for emus to lay their eggs? [Stars tab: Before Galileo \(6:47 min\)](#)
- 30) Give an example of the power of song. [Song tab: Gujingga Songline \(4:02 min\)](#); [Story tab: Creation Story 2: After the Flood \(7:25 min\)](#)
- 31) What is the musical connection between the [Song tab: Night Herding Song \(6:41 min\)](#) and the milking of cows?

## LI 16 Conservation

Many Dreaming stories can be interpreted at different levels. On one level they are spiritual stories. On another they are ecological guidebooks to how nature works and instruction manuals for land and sea managers. The Dreaming aims to conserve.

Watch the [Changing Land 1 \(9:06 min\)](#) on the *Land* tab.

1. What does Bill mean when he says, 'the Spiritual is turning everything over'?
2. Why did the rainmakers not pass on their song?
3. What does Bill mean by 'the Law'?
4. Why does Bill say sending a rocket to the moon is a dangerous thing to do?
5. In Bill's view, what changes did the moon rocket trigger?
6. What does Bill mean when he says 'the Rainbow is underneath the Spiritual'?
7. What weather events can be caused by the Rainbow Serpent? (cf Rover Thomas 'Cyclone Tracy' painting)
8. What does Bill mean when he says '... everything was very neat, lots of different plants, soil ... all looking good all the way? [Intro tab: Changing Land 1 \(9:06 min\)](#)

## LI 17 Ecology

1. Find a sign in nature which appears in a Dreaming story and tells us about ecology.  
Hint: Look at [Bush University](#) tab.  
and [Birds and Insects](#) tab.
2. Why is the *Barnarr* tree also called 'emu apple'? What ailments is that medicine good used to treat? [Bush University tab: Emu Apple / Barnarr \(8:02 min\)](#)
3. What could you use the *Yarirra* tree for? [Bush University tab: Silver Fox or Smoke Tree: Yarirra \(3:53 min\)](#)
4. Describe the look and effects of a medicinal native plant of your area.
5. Describe the look and effects of a poisonous native plant of your area.
6. In your own words, describe the habit of the flying fox?  
[Story tab: Rainbow and Flying Fox \(4:10 min\)](#)
7. Pick a bird from the [Birds and Insects](#) tab which has videos *Bills Birds 1,2,3* and investigate its habit using Internet resources.

With the information you learn, create a display for a classroom 'Visitors' Centre' (this lesson idea is similar to the 'Bush Museum'.

- What is its Wardaman name?
- What does it look like?
- Where does it live?
- What does it eat?

- Mating behavior?
  - Where does it roost?
  - How many eggs does the female lay?
  - Who raises the young?
  - Who sits on the eggs?
  - Who or what are its enemies?
  - Why do you think your bird is called what it is in English?
  - Practice its call out loud.
  - What part does it play in the life-cycle of other animals, birds, insects and plants?
  - What would it be like to be one?
  - Each student's work can be displayed in 'visitors centre'. Other students then circulate and do a learning activity on three other birds.
8. For how many birds can Bill do the call?
  9. Research a law (or even whole Act of Parliament), which aims to protect the ecological environment in your area. Why did the lawmakers make this law? Do you think it is a good law? (Give reasons). Is it the best law or should it be changed or even dropped? (Give reasons)

## LI 18 Songlines and peace across Country

Visit the interactive [Aboriginal language map](#). Note all the different language groups on the map and consider that each different color patch is a larger tribal country within which a number of distinct clan or family countries will lie. Also note that at the time of white settler arrival in 1788 the whole continent of Australia was durably divided up as shown on the map. The idea of territorial invasion or appropriation of a neighbouring tribe's country was largely unknown.

Watch [Songlines and Peace \(5:34 min\)](#) on the *Land* tab.

1. Describe, in your own words, the spiritual basis of respect between neighbouring tribes according to Bill?
2. What do you think the rest of the world could learn from the inter-tribal respect described by Bill?

## LI 19 Night sky over Country

Save this lesson idea for an overnight bush excursion. Then on a dark starry night the following questions can be addressed:

1. Where is the Southern Cross?
2. Where are the Pointers? What do they have to do with the Wardaman creation story?
3. Where is the [Emu in the Sky](#)?
4. What is different about the Emu in the Sky compared with the Southern Cross or any other constellation of stars?
5. Where is the 'Coalsack'? What part of the Emu is it?

Back in the classroom, the students can match various stars, constellations and dark spaces to Dreaming beings and research

other aspects of Aboriginal astronomy which is a fast-growing body of knowledge.

## LI 20 Contact history

This topic lends itself to analysis using a What-When-Where-Who-How-Why-Outcomes-Significance framework.

There are many aspects to contact history of course. Some very ...

Compare the events at Myall Creek NSW in 1838 with the events at Coniston NT in 1928. Each of these have study guides at the sites:

[http://www.myallcreekmassacre.com/Myall\\_Creek\\_Massacre/Home.html](http://www.myallcreekmassacre.com/Myall_Creek_Massacre/Home.html) and <http://coniston.pawmedia.com.au/> (study guide for latter at <http://theeducationshop.com.au/downloads/atom-study-guides/coniston-atom-study-guide/>).

Compare both of these with events recounted in [Whitefella Contact and Rock Art 6:04 min](#).

Watch and compare the movie *Rabbit Proof Fence* with [Black Plum and Charcoal: Stolen Generation 5:51 min](#). Access one of the many *Rabbit Proof Fence Study Guides* on the web to take this topic further.