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How to use this book

Appropriate for use in the middle and upper primary years, this book may be used in a wide variety of ways, including:

- For a two- to three-week Society and Environment work unit
- As the framework of an integrated unit of work
- As a single lesson focusing on a current or topical event, such as Australia Day
- As interesting short texts for use in literacy groups
- For comprehension activities
- For student assignments

Each unit utilises the same framework – an informative one-page text, a comprehension activity with questions incorporating each level of comprehension, a unit overview, suggested activities and a resource page.

Teachers are encouraged to take advantage of the flexible nature of this series. *Australia's past* focuses on history, and two other titles focus on geography and culture.

Australia's profiles & people

- Caroline Chisholm
- Ned Kelly
- William Farrer
- Charles Kingsford Smith
- John Flynn
- Immigration
- The coming of television
- Population
- Climate
- Our currency
- The Australian flag
- The Aboriginal flag
- Australia Day
- Anzac Day
- National Aboriginal Day
- Our federal government
- State and local government

Australia's places

- The land
- Oceans and seas
- Deserts
- Mountains
- Antarctica
- Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales
- Queensland
- Northern Territory
- Western Australia
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria





The first inhabitants

The land of Australia is many millions of years old. It is thought the ancestors of the Aboriginal people came from the north at least 50 000 years ago. Perhaps it was even more than 100 000 years ago.

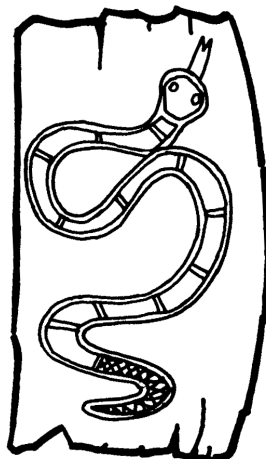
Forty thousand years ago, the Australian continent looked very different from what the first Europeans saw. The weather was cooler and there were many large inland freshwater lakes. In western Victoria some volcanoes were still erupting. Many people lived around the inland lakes. Hundreds of their archaeological sites have been excavated and studied to provide us with much information on how Aboriginals lived before the arrival of Europeans.

Around these inland lakes the people hunted reptiles and marsupials and collected shellfish and emu eggs. They also caught crayfish and large fish. Hearths of preheated mud have been found, so we know the people baked their food in earth ovens. These mud lumps are thought to be the oldest examples of deliberately fired pottery found anywhere in the world.

Aboriginal people hunted and gathered only the food they needed from day to day. They did not hoard food. While they moved about a great deal, their lands had boundaries that were known to all. In places where food was short or difficult to obtain, the land areas within the boundaries were larger.

As the Aboriginals moved through their lands they moved among spirits. The land itself was sacred to each clan member. It was not just rocks or waterfalls they saw but sacred, meaningful places, and each clan member had to learn their special meaning.

Much importance was placed on ancestry. Every person was born into a totem. A totem was some object, bird or animal that was descended from the same spirit as the person. People with the same totem could not marry.





Answer the following comprehension questions in full sentences.

1. What is a totem?
2. Describe one way in which a totem affected an aboriginal person's life.
3. Name three differences between the Australian landscape today and 40 000 years ago.
4. In what ways may life have been easier for Australia's first inhabitants?
5. In what ways may life have been more difficult for Australia's first inhabitants?
6. Describe how Aboriginals prepared hot or cooked foods.
7. Why might Aboriginals have killed only the food that they needed?
8. Explain why areas with little food had wider boundaries.
9. We have many, many laws that help us to live together in harmony. Why is that Aboriginals did not need many complex laws to achieve the same peace?
10. Using the text, predict what the word *ancestry* means.
11. Provide two reasons why the weather was much cooler when the Aboriginals alone inhabited Australia.
12. After reading this text, write three observations about Australia's first inhabitants.



PROFILE OVERVIEW

Key learning areas

- Is aware Aboriginal Australians occupied the Australian landmass well before the arrival of Europeans
- Can explain and describe the special cultural heritage of Aboriginal people

Useful vocabulary

Aboriginal
indigenous
archaeologists

didgeridoo
ancestry
respectful

boomerang
sacred

Interesting facts

- Tribal Aborigines were expected to become adults at an early age. Girls were initiated as adults at twelve and boys were initiated at fourteen.
- Not all Aboriginals were nomadic. In areas where food was plentiful they established permanent settlements.
- The main threat to the Aboriginal people was the diseases that Europeans brought with them. Thousands died from cholera, chickenpox, pneumonia and tuberculosis.
- Before the arrival of Europeans some Aboriginals in eastern Australia played ball games not unlike netball and soccer. The ball was made out of tightly wound strips of skin in a leather bag.
- The Aboriginals came to Australia from Asia. Their immigration drove the existing inhabitants, a completely different racial group, into Tasmania.

