



BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE

SANDSONG

Stories from the Great Sandy Desert

STUDY GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, create, and perform. We also wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council Protocols for Working with Indigenous Artists. Those protocols have been widely adopted in the Australian arts to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling, to dance, to set design, language and music.

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WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this Study Guide contains images, names, and writings by deceased persons.

Front Cover: Bangarra ensemble,
photo by Daniel Boud

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Study Guide is to provide contextual background and information about the themes and stories that have inspired Bangarra Dance Theatre's production of *SandSong: Stories from the Great Sandy Desert*.

Experiencing a live performance of *SandSong* offers teachers and students the opportunity to engage intellectually and emotionally with stories that have come to the stage through a rigorous process of cultural immersion and creative practices. The experience also provides the chance to explore a broad range of cross curricula topics and themes related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

For full details about the performance, please visit bangarra.com.au and download the [program](#)

We hope you enjoy *SandSong*.

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USING THIS STUDY GUIDE



photo by Daniel Boud

Dear teachers and students,

We hope you find this guide valuable and we encourage you to use the discussion starters and the list of references and links to further resources to learn more about the Place, the People and the Histories that have inspired the creation of *SandSong*.

As you read about the contextual background and historical relevance of the work, you might like to consider the contrast between western epistemologies and the knowledge systems of Indigenous Peoples.

Finally, we invite you to consider the role of the Arts in shaping our understandings of the world, and be inspired to contribute to the ongoing dialogue that continually questions who we are and where we are going.

CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander histories and cultures

GENERAL CAPABILITIES

Critical and creative thinking
Intercultural understanding
Ethical understanding

LEARNING AREAS

The Arts (Dance, Music, Visual
Arts, Media Arts)
Humanities and Social Science
(History, Geography, Civics and
Citizenship)
Science

TOPICS/THEMES

Indigenous perspectives
Australian Cultures
Australian Society
History (Ancient and Modern)
Human Rights
Native Title
Sovereignty
Environmental science
Contemporary dance theatre
practice
Contemporary design practice
Literature/Storytelling

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS DANCE THEATRE

PERSPECTIVES, VOICES & CULTURES

The evolution of Indigenous contemporary dance can be explored as a continuum – a shifting and growing field of cultural exchange, art, storytelling, and shared experiences. Bearing witness to the physical expression of traditional and contemporary modes of storytelling can both challenge and unite us, but fundamentally these experiences illustrate the immutable importance of identity, belonging and connectedness in all societies and cultures. Learning by experiencing either a live performance, or a video recording of a live performance, and being free to offer personal responses, enables students to be participants in the creative process as they engage with the work through discussions that encourage critical and creative thinking.

The concept of contemporary Indigenous dance theatre cannot be understood as a categorised genre or a particular form because it exists as part of a continuum that responds to a diversity of culture and developing perspectives. Any contemporary Indigenous dance production that incorporates music/sound, design and other conventions of the theatre will inevitably have a deep purpose and an essential spirit that is, and will always be, about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture. While drawing on traditional stories and cultural ways of being, Indigenous dance theatre provides an important platform to give voice to Indigenous people living in a modern world that experiences constant change, and where the threat to cultural identity is relentlessly present.

The growth in availability of technical resources, an increasing number of performance venues, and the proliferation of new arts festivals and digital platforms, has greatly supported the development of new Indigenous dance theatre, as well as the careers of the many creative artists involved. As more new work is created, support for the infrastructure and training that underpins these forms has also grown, resulting in a critical mass of professional artists involved in producing high quality productions that increase the demand we currently see from audiences in Australia and internationally. One of the most important outcomes of these developments is the fact that more Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people are able to see their cultures reflected in this unique form and are able to celebrate the resilience of Australia's First Nations people and their ancestors through the sharing of works that depict Indigenous stories, cultures and perspectives.

It is important to consider the language we use when talking and writing about Indigenous cultures in the context of art: when it is made, how it is made and where the source material comes from. The general application and understandings of the terms 'traditional' and 'contemporary' can be problematic when critiquing Indigenous dance theatre. By fixing the term 'contemporary' to the form, it could be argued that we are implying 'post-colonial', 'modern' or 'non-traditional'. Yet with many new works sourcing their inspiration from the Indigenous cultures that have existed since ancient times, what is 'traditional' and what is 'new' can exist simultaneously. This is often expressed by saying Indigenous Australian cultures are the oldest living, and continuous cultures in the world.

FORM, ACTIVATION & PROCESS

One way of exploring the development of Indigenous dance theatre over the last three or four decades is to trace the journeys of some of the artists who have been significant contributors to that development. It should be noted that while many opportunities have been opened up for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to develop in their choreographic work and their leadership roles, the true force behind this development has been the commitment and determination of the individual artists themselves. Artists and leaders like Carole Y. Johnson, Stephen Page, Frances Rings, Raymond Blanco, Vicki van Hout, Gary Lang, and Marilyn Miller, are some who have paved the way. More recently Elma Kris, Deborah Brown, Yolande Brown, Joel Bray, Jasmin Sheppard, Katina Olsen, Daniel Riley, Mariaa Randall, Sani Townsen, Jacob Boehme, Ghenoa Gela, Thomas E. S. Kelly, and Amrita Hepi are contributing to the ever-growing critical mass of Indigenous contemporary dance in Australia.

Building a skills base has been a significant contributor to Indigenous contemporary dance and dance theatre to the point where there is now a developing critical mass, rich in diversity and quality. The establishment of training institutions like National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) Dance College in Sydney, and Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts (ACPA) in Brisbane, have been fundamentally important to increasing technical skills to support the creation of new works. Market development initiatives, the growth of touring networks, and a range of strategic programs to address identified gaps in the infrastructure, have been and continue to be critical to the growth and sustainability of this work.

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS DANCE THEATRE

From the mid-20th Century, contemporary forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expression emerged across all art forms and began to infiltrate mainstream arts programs that largely drew on western cultures and/or western forms of presentation. By the 1960s, young black theatre makers, playwrights, writers and actors were creating works that reflected their culture in both the pre-colonial and post-settlement worlds. Writers Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, and actor/directors Bryan Syron and Bob Maza were among some of the black theatre makers who lay the foundation for the strong Indigenous theatre scene that exists today. Novelist Faith Bandler, and poet/artist/educator Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) were also strong voices in the new wave of Indigenous writers whose works now form part of Australia's rich and diverse literary landscape. The wave of contemporary Indigenous artists that followed in the wake of the Papunya Tula art movement in the 1970s has seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work acquired for major collections around the world, which command impressive prices in auction houses globally. Many, if not all, of these artists also consider themselves activists, and there is no doubt that their work has had a significant impact on the way non-Indigenous people have learned about Indigenous cultures and the ongoing political struggle of First Nations people in the context of post-settlement life.

The creative processes of any artist tend to emerge through a range of influences, discovery and personal experience. Yet for Indigenous artists, these processes are more complex. Respect for cultural protocols, the need for community engagement, and a strong commitment to enforce care for traditional knowledge that is shared, and/or provided through a process of request, invitation, permission and transmission, are all things that need to be considered and upheld

as new expressions are created by Indigenous artists. Navigating all these considerations is complicated and takes time. However, the ongoing development of Indigenous dance (and other contemporary art forms) is dependent on these protocols and practices being observed and implemented to ensure cultural continuity. Stories, songs, dances, and connection to Place are sacred, and are passed on through oral transmission, so there is no central knowledge source, and written information is usually second hand. Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights are variously enshrined both Australian and international conventions and statements and are an important safety net that seeks to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures to survive and thrive.

COUNTRY, RELATIONSHIP & CONNECTION

'Country', as a western construct, is mostly understood as a defined place, marked by borders, (natural and/or imposed), and operating on principles of sovereignty and the governance of the nation by the state. Ethnicity, religion, environment, and histories of colonisation and conflict are signifiers that overlay the identification of a 'country'. As history shows, these factors have often been the cause of conflict between groups who claim their right to a particular piece of land and/or seas is justified. And that justification, is often closely associated with human rights, where groups can show a perpetual connection to the land in order to validate their right to occupy. In a 'modern' context, the concept of public, private, individual, or collective ownership of property, be that land, a house, a business has developed over just a few thousand years. The right to own property that has a capital value, possesses certain features and resources, can be bought and sold for profit, and

the protection of these interests by law, is the enduring assurance of the western capitalist system.

The concept of Country and Land for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is extremely different!

The spiritual dimension of Country cannot be detached from the physical. Country can mean a person's Land where they were born, as well as the sea, sky, rivers, sacred sites, seasons, plants and animals. It can also be a place of heritage, belonging, and spirituality that is inseparable from the land. Hence, the impact of displacement from Country, and the disruption to that sense of Belonging to one's Country, can be catastrophic for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural and economic well-being. Story, song, dance, and ancestral lineage provide the foundation for an existence on this earth, and a passage to and from the worlds beyond life on earth – and those stories and songs all link to Country as a home for Culture.

For Indigenous people, these complex relationships are like threads in a tapestry of exploration that has no beginning and no end, yet is founded on, and maintained through, specific information that is transmitted by 'walking on Country', oral transference and a range of other traditional practices.

When artists draw from the concept of Country, they are essentially bearing the responsibility of Culture care, illustrating it and making it meaningful to many different people from many backgrounds.



Lilian Banks, Bradley Smith and Rika Hamaguchi
photo by Daniel Boud

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



Frances Rings, Djakapurra Munyarryun, and Marilyn Miller, photo by Greg Barrett



Bangarra Dancers, photo by James Morgan



Carole Y Johnson, Matthew Doyle, and Phillip Lanley, photographer unknown



Bangarra Dancers and Crew, photo by Tiffany Parker

Bangarra Dance Theatre was founded by American woman, Carole Y. Johnson. Born in New Jersey and growing up in Philadelphia, Johnson first came to Australia in the early 1970s as a dancer with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company from New York.

Johnson had experienced the full impact of the civil rights movement in the 1960s and been a part of the proliferation of new modern dance exponents across America, who were focused on freeing dance from its institutionalised bases and using dance to make commentary on the contemporary world. She studied at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York and was awarded scholarships to work with communities in Africa. Johnson knew the power of dance as a practice, and as a communication platform.

During her time in Australia in 1972, she was asked to conduct dance workshops. These were very successful and resulted in a Johnson's new dance production that depicted Australia's own civil rights actions. *The Challenge – Embassy Dance* was about the Moratorium for Black Rights initiated by workers unions in 1972, and the challenge to uphold the presence of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy.

Johnson quickly realised that there was a lack of contemporary dance expression in the Australian sociocultural environment and decided that she would do something about it. On the back of her workshops, she established the Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Scheme in 1976, which was to later become the National Aboriginal Islander Skills Development Association – known today as NAISDA Dance College. At

the same time, black theatre makers, playwrights, writers, and actors were creating works that reflected their culture in both its pre-colonial and post-settlement states (see Form, Activation & Process, page 5).

By the 1980s, NAISDA had developed a performance arm called the Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre, which showcased the development of students into professional Dancers and also gave opportunities for these Dancers to develop as Choreographers. Raymond Blanco, Marilyn Miller and Dujon Nuie were some of the artists who took on the role of Choreographer and paved the way for many more to come.

In 1989, Johnson founded a new company, Bangarra Dance Theatre. Bangarra is a Wiradjuri word meaning 'to make fire'. In 1991, Stephen Page was appointed Artistic Director and premiered his first work, *Up Until Now* for the company in October of the same year. Page continues to lead Bangarra to this day, along with Associate Artistic Director Frances Rings, appointed in 2019.

BANGARRA TODAY

Today, Bangarra is one of Australia's leading performing arts companies, widely acclaimed nationally and around the world for its powerful dancing, distinctive theatrical voice and utterly unique soundscapes, music and design. The company is recognised globally for distinctive theatre productions that combine the spirituality of traditional culture with contemporary forms of storytelling through dance.

Bangarra is supported with funding through the Australia Council (the federal Government's arts funding

and advisory body), Create NSW (NSW arts policy and funding body) and a number of private philanthropic organisations and donors. The company also derives earnings from performance seasons, special events and touring.

Based in Sydney, Bangarra presents performance seasons in Australian capital cities, regional towns and remote areas, and has also taken its productions to many places around the world including Europe, Asia and the USA.

Bangarra provides the opportunity for people of all cultural backgrounds to be able to share knowledge about, and have a contemporary experience of, the world's oldest living culture. Bangarra has nurtured the careers of hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professional artists, including Dancers, Choreographers, Composers and designers.

Since 1989, Bangarra has produced dozens of original works for its repertoire, collaborated on the creation of new productions with other Australian performing arts companies such as The Australian Ballet and the Sydney Theatre Company, and played an integral role in opening ceremonies of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2018 Commonwealth Games. In 2016, Bangarra created its first feature film, *Spear*.

Bangarra's Dancers and collaborating artists come from all over Australia, including the major groups in relation to location, for example: Torres Strait Islanders, Queensland (Murri), New South Wales (Koori), Victoria (Koorie), South Australia (Anangu and Nunga), Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Yolngu), Coast and Midwest Western Australia (Yamatji), Southern Western

Australia (Nyoongar), Central Western Australia (Wangai) and Tasmania (Palawah). Some of the Dancers are graduates of NAISDA Dance College (NSW), or Aboriginal College of Performing Arts (QLD), and others are graduates of dance courses delivered by schools and universities around Australia. For more information about Bangarra – its history, people and productions, visit www.bangarra.com.au

CULTURAL INHERITANCE & TRANSFERAL OF KNOWLEDGE

Storytelling in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life is the means by which cultural systems, values, and identity are preserved and transferred. Telling stories through song, music and dance, in order to connect people to land, and teach them about their culture and the traditions of their ancestors is the way knowledge is passed from generation to generation. Knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander totemic systems, the histories of peoples, clans and tribal associations, language, land, and concepts and connections of kinship, are maintained through these stories.

Many of Bangarra's productions are based on or include traditional stories, that can also have meaning for the contemporary existence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and people. Expressing and maintaining culture through contemporary interpretations and rich theatrical realisations enables the world of Australian Indigenous culture to be shared with the full diversity of today's audiences.

THE DREAMING

Indigenous spirituality exists in the concept of the 'Dreaming'. Dreaming stories connect Indigenous people to the past, create relevance to the present, and guide people into the future. Dreaming stories can illustrate the phenomena of creation, transformation, natural forces, and life principles. They are specifically related to landforms, places, creatures and communities. The ancestral beings that populate the stories form the spiritual essence of the stories. Bangarra's portrayal of stories of the Dreaming through the contemporary

dance theatre form requires a diligent process of connecting and building a relationship with the traditional custodians of those stories so that the integrity and authenticity is respected.

CONSULTATION & OBSERVANCE OF PROTOCOLS

For all of its productions, the Bangarra Creative Teams research and explore the stories of Indigenous cultures in close consultation and collaboration with their traditional custodians, before embarking on the process of creating the production. Each year, Bangarra spends time in specific Indigenous communities, meeting with Elders and traditional owners and living with the people of that community – learning about the stories that connect the people, the land, the language, and the creatures of the land. Everyone who works at Bangarra feels very strongly about their role in the company's work. They make sure that the stories they tell are true to the traditional owners of those stories and uphold the integrity of the stories' meanings.

EXPERIENCING DANCE IN A THEATRICAL CONTEXT

It is important to note that dance theatre works are essentially artistic invention and are created to express a broad range of ideas and thoughts. While some information is provided in the program notes of each production, the viewer is free to interpret the work according to their individual perspectives, emotional responses, and level of experience in the viewing of performing arts. Repeated viewing of the work, along with the cumulative process of learning about the themes, source material, cross-referencing of the range of subject matter and creative processes involved in the making of the work, contributes to personal and critical responses to the work. Bangarra invites its audiences to share, learn, and appreciate the critical importance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in order to understand their own relationship with the cultures and the people of Australia's First Nations.

READING LIST



Shaping the Landscape: celebrating dance in Australia. ed. Stephanie Burridge, Julie Dyson. Routledge, New Delhi, India & Abingdon, UK, 2012.

Deadly Sounds, deadly places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Australia. Dunbar-Hall, Peter & Gibson, Chris, UNSW press, 2004.

Aboriginal Voices: Contemporary Aboriginal artists, writers and performers. Compiled by Liz Thompson, Simon & Schuster, Australia, 1990.



'The Deep Archive: Wesley Enoch on Contemporary Indigenous Arts Practice'. Real Time Arts, 2017. <http://www.realtime.org.au/the-deep-archive-wesley-enoch-on-contemporary-indigenous-arts-practice/>

Carole Y. Johnson (bio) <https://trove.nla.gov.au/people/1491391?c=people> <https://www.delvingintodance.com/podcast/carole-johnson>



Bangarra Dance Theatre YouTube channel for interviews with Stephen Page and other Bangarra creatives. <https://www.youtube.com/user/bangarradancetheatre>

1 / VAST, DIVERSE AND *VERY* OLD

‘Young people gotta look after that country, and that culture. That’s a big culture, that one’.

**JUGUJA DOLLY SNELL. VERBAL
QUOTE FROM THE FILM *PUTPARRI
AND THE RAINMAKERS*, 2015**

When we refer to the lands of the Kimberley and the Great Sandy Desert we are talking about a vast area. We are talking about a combined area of approximately 700,000 square kilometres, about a tenth of the continent. We are also talking about one of the most sparsely populated areas in the world with a population of around 36,000, representing 0.144% of Australia’s total population.

This is a diverse landscape – from a tropical belt of wetlands in the north-west with escarpments of 800 metres above sea-level, south through the Yampi Peninsula, which is part monsoonal and part desert, down and inland to the arid red sands of the Great Sandy Desert where any significant rainfalls are quickly evaporated, and across to the Bungle Bungle Ranges where ancient seabed deposits exist in the arid eastern plains of the Kimberley.

In a basic (and Western) sense, the Kimberley experiences three climate seasons – the dry season, the ‘build up’ and the wet season. The dry season, April/May to September, sees a great deal of blue sky and little rainfall. The ‘build up’ from October to November comes with violent storms and higher temperatures. The wet season descends with relentless rain and humidity, bringing rivers to extremely high levels. Waterfalls pound the ground, and many roads are impassable. However, this three-stage annual weather cycle is a rather simplistic description. In actual fact there are a great many more components and variables in the cycles, each signifying something about the land, the creatures and how people sustain themselves.

The biological diversity of the Kimberley and Great Sandy Desert includes native plants and animals that are either unique to the area or have disappeared from other parts of the continent. These include unique wildflowers and grasses that are used in Aboriginal medicines, the glorious Gouldian Finch and the Northern Quoll, and a number of unique snail species.

Geological origins of the Kimberley reach back over nearly 2000 million years when the Kimberley was a separate land mass. Around 1800 million years ago this massive area collided with the Pilbara and Yilgram land mass. The King Leopold Ranges are the point of where this impact occurred. The oldest rocks found in the Kimberley are around Leonard Hills, Bow Creek Hills and the Halls Creek ridges, and date well before the appearance of any organisms on this earth. Inland areas contain evidence of coral reefs, and fish fossils have been discovered around the Gogo and Fossil Downs cattle stations.

Evidence of human existence in the area goes back over 60,000 years. As these early First Nations people moved across the lands and seas, adapting to climates and building systems for survival, they developed a deep understanding of the Land – how to care for it and how it could sustain them.



JILA (LIVING WATER) AND KURTAL

In the central Kimberley and Great Sandy Desert, as in any dry or desert landscape in any part of the world, water is a precious commodity. However, for Indigenous communities of this region, ngapangu (water), including underground sources, is the basis for cultural beliefs and practices that underpin livelihoods and the connection to ancestors. Rainfall events and cycles of wet and dry involve carefully managed relationships with the *Kurtal*.

Kurtal inhabit the permanent natural water holes - the *Jila*. The *Kurtal* is both spirit and serpent, and is responsible for the creation of landforms, the bringing of rain and the seeding of plants and species associated with water. Each *Jila* is home to a specific *Kurtal* and it is important to approach the waterhole with the correct song and ceremony.

Aboriginal people invoke the *Kurtal* to bring rain and life to the land. The serpent spirit breathes vapour into the air forming clouds. There are different clouds for different purposes - the low Mayilbu clouds signal the start of the rainmaking ritual, Nangkali clouds hold *Kalpurdu*, and Kukukudu clouds contain the invisible seeds that fall into the ground to grow into frogs, turtles, eels, goanna, ducks and freshwater fish.

Desert waterholes can be found throughout the Kimberley and Great Sandy desert. They are sustained by groundwater discharge and can be accessed for water long after rivers and creeks have dried up. As a result, they can support people, animals and plants for long periods of time. However, they also need to be part of the environmental management

systems so that they are not exploited or misused. Aboriginal people hold the knowledge to care for the waterholes.

When white settlers became aware of the abundant water supplies in bores and waterholes, they often over stocked the country with cattle resulting in environmental degradation which can be seen in many parts of the Fitzroy River catchment. Quite often, grazing stock wander into creeks in search of water destroying riverbanks which subsequently wash away in the wet season, disturbing and in some cases destroying the fragile ecosystems that support the life of plants and animals and the quality of the water.

2 / PEOPLE BEFORE PEOPLE

“The Wandjinas belonged to people long before our time. They created our laws. We still have to obey these laws ...”

YORNADAIYN (DONNY) WOOLAGOODJA. BORN 1947.

RENOWNED KIMBERLEY ARTIST, EDUCATOR AND ADVOCATE FOR NATIVE TITLE.

FIRST PEOPLE

Human existence in the Kimberley is as old as any in Australia. It is speculated that the first humans travelled to the continent about 60,000 years ago landing on the coastline of the Kimberley before moving through to the inland. Among the early arrivals were the Gwion Gwion people. The Gwion Gwion were artists and decorated many sites all over the Kimberley with beautiful highly decorative art. Dated at around 12,000 before present (BP), these paintings are often referred to as the Bradshaw paintings, after pastoralist Joseph Bradshaw who was the first European to view the art in 1891 while he was searching for arable pastoral land.

The Bradshaw paintings differ from another pre-historic art evidence in the Kimberley referred to as the Wandjina. First seen by white explorers in the 1930s, the Wandjina paintings portray very powerful rain spirits who are often associated with creation stories and flooding rain. They are depicted with headdresses that represent the lightning and thunder, hollow eyes and no mouth – the Wandjina have no cause to speak because they are so powerful.

One Wandjina legend tells of the ‘star with trails’ causing a great flood. There is now evidence of an event in the period between 1620 and 1730, when a powerful mega-tsunami, possibly caused by a meteorite falling into the Indian Ocean, crashed into the Kimberley coast. Waves travelled as far as the Great Sandy Desert carrying giant boulders, many tons in weight, and depositing them in the desert. This mega-tsunami has been noted as a Wandjina event and is reflected in stories, cave paintings and oral traditions of the Worrorra, Wunumbul and Ngarinyin people.



Image courtesy of State Library of Western Australia

Description: Black and white photograph of six fair skinned men wearing three piece suits. Four are standing and are grouped around two others who are sitting. Alexander Forrest is one of the seated men and is in the centre of the group. There are two dark-skinned Aboriginal men, wearing buttoned up suits, sitting on the floor in front of the seated men.

NEW ARRIVALS: WAVES OF CHANGE

European settlement in the Kimberley regions occurred later than in most other parts of Australia, except on the north west coast where contact between Aboriginal people and ‘outsiders’ had occurred since the sixteenth century with interactions between the Makassan trepan (thariba) fishers from Indonesia and the tribes of the north western Kimberley. This was followed by several Dutch explorers, some of whose boats ran aground on the reefs.

British settlement began and grew quickly in Western Australia, including the Kimberley, from around the mid 1860s, driven largely by political and capitalist desires to develop industries such as cattle and mining. Explorers and surveyors were commissioned to go in search of fertile land, minerals and

precious stones. Colonial governments provided the infrastructure to develop land for the benefit of white settlers, disregarding completely the original custodians’ rights to that land, their deep knowledge of its environments and their thousands of years of careful management.

In 1879, after several grazing runs had been established in the Fitzroy Valley, the Western Australian surveyor Alexander Forrest was sent to look for fertile land and gold in the northern part of the state. His party included his brother Matthew Forrest, a government geologist from Victoria and two Aboriginal men, Tommy Pierre and Tommy Dower from Nyungah country in the south who were recruited to the expedition as trackers and horse men.

As was the common practice of naming places after members of the British aristocracy, Forrest

named the whole region he explored 'the Kimberley' after the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley. He reported great potential for tropical agriculture and extensive grazing, and the possibility that gold would also be discovered. Forrest also proposed that Aboriginal people who lived in the region might provide a source of labour to support the development of colonial enterprise.

By the early 1900s, political and economic forces had wrought enormous impact on the Kimberley region as well as the people who lived there. The systems, structures and imported ways of life changed the lives of Indigenous people forever and that change is now permanent. It started with traders, then came the pearlers, the pastoral industry, the mining companies and more recently tourism – all geared to make the economy (and people) rich. But at what cost?

The post invasion history of the Kimberley (as with so many parts of the country) is rife with terrible tragedies. Massacres, targeted murders, imprisonment, removal, exploitation, torture and slavery were commonly experienced and witnessed. Public records and oral histories provide a great deal of evidence about the terrifying treatment of Aboriginal people of the Kimberley and Great Sandy Desert. Very sadly, these practices endured well into the 20th century, and their legacy is visible to this day.

From the 1870s, Aboriginal people have been coerced or forced into the pastoral and pearling industries, and institutionalized in missions, prisons, hospitals, ration depots and reserves. Colonisation has had a severe impact on the lives of Kimberley Aboriginal people and forced dramatic changes to traditional ways of life - many lost their lives or were dispossessed of their country and homelands. But throughout the intense disruption wrought by colonisation, over time Aboriginal people have devised strategies that have enabled an accommodation (sic) with the new regime, and which has ensured their long-term survival as a distinct and proud people.

Jebb and Allbrok, 'Perspective – First Contact', 2008.

Oral history accounts by Aboriginal people report that assistance was given to European explorers like

Forrest as a way to 'manage' the European incursions. It has been suggested that Aboriginal people guided explorers through Country in an effort to lessen the strangers' impact upon traditional ways of life, and to ensure their time on their time on country would be as brief as possible. A strategy that failed in the face of the white man's onslaught.

THE WALMAJARRI EXODUS

The period between the 1920s and 1960s saw the greatest movement of people in the Kimberley area including the Walmajarri people of the Fitzroy Valley river (*Mandowara* - river). They were drawn from the desert to cattle and sheep stations out of economic interest and curiosity, and a desire to sample new goods. At first, they lived as 'fringe-dwellers', camping in the hills, living in 'humpies', hunting, poaching cattle and receiving rations. They were very quickly forced to work for the station owners.

News of this different life spread to more remote communities and more people gradually followed suit. Despite the deep feelings of displacement that people felt about leaving their Country and everything that had given their life meaning, the exodus continued into the 1960s.

By the 1970s - it was complete. The desert people travelled by foot from their homelands to the stations, and the decision to do so was not made lightly. Just moving away from their familiar sandhill country, where they knew every waterhole, its myths and spirits, into a territory with strange landforms producing different vegetation and animal life, would have been terrifying. Not to mention the alien nature of white peoples' ways and mindsets.

I was standing there, facing north, when suddenly I heard, 'Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,' coming from the same direction where we'd been hunting. Wait a minute - what's that? I thought, staring towards the place where the sound came from. Then I saw it. A long-necked animal came into sight - there were several of them. Two with men on their backs. ... I ran and hid in a nearby bush ... and sat there without making sound.

NORA NGUWAYIR - in *Out of the Desert: Stories from the Walmajarri Storytellers*, Magabala, 2002.



DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. Examine the concepts listed below and discuss how they are different; who they serve; and whether or how they might come into conflict with each other.
 - **Land custodianship** – caring for Land, knowing the Land, sustaining the Land's environment
 - **Land ownership** – capital value, exploitation for profit, ownership, title
 - **Sovereignty** – authority, governance, and power over a land with (or without) borders.
2. Think about the act of **displacement**. How would it feel to be forced off the Land that connects you to your family, your ancestors, your sustenance, your knowledge systems?
3. Think about the practice of **exploitation**. What would it feel like to be consulted for your expert knowledge and highly skilled capacities, while being abused for your race? How would it feel to be punished for simply existing, or to be captured and sold for money?

ON NAMING RIGHTS

Early European explorers and developers took it upon themselves to name landforms and places, pastoral leases and mining sites after people, places, or mythology originating in Europe. Aristocrats, family names and already existing place names (mostly from Britain) were commonly drawn upon to name landmarks or areas of land, and usually bore no relevance to the people or heritage of that Land. For example, the Kimberley area of WA was named by explorer Alexander Forrest after John Wodehouse, the 1st Earl of Kimberley; the Fitzroy River was named in 1838 after Richard Fitzroy, the Commander of the HMAS Beagle, and Halls Creek was named after Charles Hall who found gold in WA in 1885.

Naming of places, property, and businesses after people is a common western practice and one that is completely different to Indigenous people's identification practices of 'place', where a name has meaning and reference to lore, heritage, story, a spiritual creature, a geographical formation, or for purely practical noting, such as location of essential resources, like water, ochre, or food.

Mount Tuckfield	Weranjo (the ghost)
Tree Hill	Yelenbanany (lonely, quiet)
Sturt Creek	Worengade (towards the camp)
Fitzroy River	Mandowara (river)
Lake Elliot	Edar (the deep water)
Lake Louisa	Dyelargon (clear, clean)

Many more examples can be found in this journal article published in 1944.

Worms, Ernest. *Aboriginal Place Names in Kimberley, Western Australia, Oceania*, Jun., 1944, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jun., 1944), pp. 284-310 Published by: Wiley on behalf of Oceania Publications, University of Sydney.

A number of European missionaries like Ernest Worms conducted anthropological, ethnographic and linguistic research studies at a time when there were many language speakers in communities, hence the detail in these records.



3 / POLICY AFTER POLICY

PROTECTION / CONTROL / EXPLOITATION

With European exploration, settlement and development, came western institutions of governance and administration. Government policies were signed through parliament to support and enable the administration of the western ruling power. As such, under so-called policies of 'protection' came the practices of removal and displacement, and in the absence of fair employment regulation and acknowledgement of human rights came high levels of maltreatment and even criminal acts towards Aboriginal people. Much of this history is on the official record, documented by historians and Aboriginal people who were there at the time. The narratives are factual and clear however, the impact of these policies is complex. The way Aboriginal people adapted their lives, showing resistance in the face of persecution is evident in the way policies have been shaped and interpreted to this day.

Prior to the 1930s, successive Western Australian governments set up various departments to deal with frontier scenarios as industry advanced across the state, often referring to those scenarios as the 'native' problem. Such as:

1887 to 1898
Aborigines Protection Board

1898 to 1908
Aborigines Department

1908 to 1920
Department of Aborigines and Fisheries

1920 to 1926
Department of North West

1926 to 1936
Aborigines Department

From 1936 to 1955, the WA government's Department of Native Affairs developed policies that were clearly racist both in intent and outcome:

- Under the Native Administration Act, the Commissioner was the appointed legal guardian of every Aboriginal child until the age of 21 and was empowered to direct who should have custody of the child.
- The Minister was empowered to issue a warrant providing for the arrest of an Aboriginal person and authorise his/her confinement for as long as he deemed fit. No judicial process was involved and there was no provision for appeal. This was used for the separation of children from their parents and the removal of whole families to institutions.

- It was an offence for an Aboriginal person to move below the 26th parallel latitude without a permit from the Minister.
- It was an offence for Aboriginal people to leave their employment (15 sections of the legislation regulated the employment of Aboriginal people). This was enforced until well into the 1960s.
- Police officers could order Aboriginal people out of towns and parts of towns, and cities could be declared prohibited areas for Aboriginal people.
- It was an offence for an Aboriginal female to be within two miles of the mouth of a creek or inlet between sunset and sunrise.
- An Aboriginal person could be banished from his country for cattle killing.
- An Aboriginal adult had to obtain the Commission's consent to marry.

To this day, Australia's First Nations people continue to be impacted by the legacy of these racist policies that fail to recognise and respect Indigenous people's rights and their deep connection to this Land. Yet while western political and economic pressures persist, and social mind sets shift toward and away from the truth of the past and the state of the present, the strength of Culture has endured as a foundation for hope.

THE WA ABORIGINES ACT OF 1905

The Western Australian *Aborigines Act 1905* was constituted to control all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives. The Chief Protector of Aborigines was central to the implementation of the Act. His powers over Aboriginal people were extensive. He was the legal guardian of every Aboriginal child, or then-called 'half-caste' child under the age of sixteen. He had the right to intervene for the general care and 'protection' of Aboriginal peoples' lives. Under this practice of so-called 'protection' came actions such as removal of children, exploitation, and cultural devastation.

Employers of Aboriginal people were compelled to provide adequate food rations, medical care, clothing and blankets, however, these rations were barely adequate, and often limited to flour, tea, tobacco and sugar. Monitoring compliance was in the hands of the station owners.

The WA Governor was given the power to reserve areas of Crown land up to a limit of 2,000 acres in any magisterial district, and to order the removal of any unemployed Aboriginal person to a reserve. Under the Act, an Aboriginal woman was required to get the permission of the Chief Protector if she wished to marry a non-Aboriginal man, and it was an offence for mixed race couples to live together, reflecting a longstanding and profound fear among white officials about racial mixing.

Broome, and other towns throughout Western Australia, were declared 'prohibited' to Aboriginal people, unless they applied for 'citizenship' - a demeaning process that involved individuals publicly renouncing their cultural ties and families in exchange for the rights enjoyed automatically by white Australians.

The WA Aborigines Act passed legislation in 1905, just five years after the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Bill was passed in the British Parliament, and four years after one of the first substantive pieces of legislation was passed in the new parliament - The Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901. Often referred to as the White Australia policy, by today's standards, the overt racism of this law is shocking, and perhaps equally as shocking is the fact that it remained as an official policy until 1966. First Nations people were not only caught up in this racist legislation but were disempowered even further due to the openly spoken and accepted opinion that the Indigenous people of these Lands were a dying race.



[READ THE FULL AND ORIGINAL WA ABORIGINES ACT 1905](#)



DISCUSSION STARTERS

- In the context of rule by government, what do we mean by 'policy'? What is its purpose, how is it developed, communicated, and evaluated - and who is it meant to serve?
- Constitutional recognition of First Nations Australians has not been achieved despite decades of discussion, consultation and advocacy. What are the challenges in changing the constitution?

We can't predict the future, but we can speculate. What might constitutional recognition for Australia's First Nation people look like? What kind of change might it bring?

- What might be some legacy issues in relation to previous legislation like the White Australia Policy, the WA Aborigines Act of 1905, and the raft of 'protection' policies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Kartiya

Kartiya (*kartipa*, *kartiba*) - Walmajarri, Gurindji, and Warlpiri (in the form kardiya). - meaning; the white man'.

Kartiya are unpredictable and unreliable. Even the best of them make promises they don't keep. It is necessary to extract the maximum value from them while you can, because tomorrow or next week or next year they will be gone, and there will be a whole lot of new ones to break in.

FROM 'KARTIYA ARE LIKE TOYOTAS' BY KIM MAHOOD, GRIFFITH REVIEW, 2021.



Photo Lisa Tomasetti

4 / SURVIVAL

Central to the post-contact history of the Kimberley has been the capacity of Aboriginal people to resist, adapt and essentially do everything in their power to survive, despite the undeniable damage that outsiders have caused in regard to their land and their lives. 'The accommodation' is a term often referred to as some sort of agreement between pastoral lease holders and Aboriginal people that enabled the 'success' of the pastoral and mining industries. This implies that Aboriginal people willingly compromised their existence, their cultural systems in order to be a part of the white man's world. However, when using the words 'accommodation', 'success', 'development' we need to consider from whose perspective these words are expressed. For Aboriginal people it was essentially about 'survival' - so in fact, these words have little to do with actual truth.

In 1950, WA station owners reluctantly agreed with the Commissioner of Native Affairs to pay Aboriginal stockmen £1 per month, and 'yardmen' and women employees 10 shillings per month, well below award rates for white workers because the consensus was that the system ('the accommodation') that had evolved since the early 1900s was working. It was commonly accepted that Aboriginal pastoral workers and their families would be provided food rations and shelter from cradle to grave in exchange for cheap labour. The cost of these rations was of course far below the cost of hiring non-Indigenous labour from coastal towns, this providing more profit to station owners.

This all changed after the wage decision in 1967 when Aboriginal station workers were brought under the Federal Pastoral Award which had previously exempted

Aboriginal workers. However, rather than improving the situation, it only served to create another chapter of cultural destruction.

'From the early days Aboriginal people were forced to work on the stations. All the stations came to depend on cheap Aboriginal labour. The Aboriginal people knew they were being exploited, but they didn't have any choice. Then during the 50s and 60s, Aboriginal stockmen started pushing for better wages. They didn't realise the drastic effect it would have on their lives.'

John Watson, former chair of the Kimberley Land Council in interview with Fiona Skyring, 2009.

Prior to the wage decision, families could stay together. In the wet season they would be 'released' so that they could travel back to Country for spiritual re-connection with their Home Lands. This was also a time for Ceremony and law business, visiting sacred sites and eating traditional food.

"... like in those days it happened every year - like a holiday time. Just for a short time and then people go back to their station. They bin chuck out their narga' and put their trousers and shirt. Dresses on and go back and work for Kartiya and so that year in, year out'.

Senior Elder, June Davis in A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story, 2013.

It was essentially a feudal system and a form of slavery and existed in direct opposition to human rights movements around the world. As campaigns for equal wages in Australia ramped up, the 'accommodation' was no longer an option.

THE WAGE DECISION - 1967 (ENACTED IN THE WET SEASON BETWEEN 1968 AND 1969).

In 1967 Indigenous workers were brought under the Federal Cattle Workers Act and were subsequently entitled to equal wages for their work as stockmen and station workers. On the surface this seems like a good initiative - in truth it caused utter devastation for many Aboriginal people. Wages were negotiated to the lowest possible rate. One of the common excuses was that Indigenous workers were 'slow' workers.

The distribution of rations quickly dried up, non-working family members were ordered off (and in some cases physically removed) from stations. Families were split. With no work and no rations, people who were used to living a uniquely sustainable 'two worlds' existence, were displaced in large numbers to towns like Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek, Derby and Broome.

The impact of the Wages decision wasn't immediate - but it was swift. The 'Emergency Camp' set up at Fitzroy is described by Olive Knight.

"At the Mission, of it was quite shocking you know. The living conditions. I suppose you describe it as refugee camp you know. "Sort of people packed like sardine. Making little humpies. Hardly any room to move and there was a little space, a tiny little piece of land that you can all sort of pack yourselves into and there only one toilet and one shower sort of thing".

Olive Knight in A Town is Born: The Fitzroy Crossing Story, 2013.



Description: 1891 Map of Australia drawn across the geographic latitude and longitude coordinates. Four shades are shown in different areas of the continent: White for no slavery; Diagonal lines infill for milder forms of slavery; crossing lines in opposite diagonals for worst forms of slavery; black infill for where 'natives' (sic) all destroyed in Black War.

SLAVERY IN AUSTRALIA

In the late 1700s, the Abolitionist movement in UK was formalised with the establishment of the Abolitionist Society. In the early 1800s, slavery was prohibited by legislation in both USA and UK. In 1815 the Congress of Vienna comprising most European sovereign nations declared opposition to any form of slavery worldwide. Over the next hundred years countries on all continents worked to abolish slavery from all parts of the world – including Australia.

However, up until the 1950s, the entrapment of Aboriginal people for the intention to have them work on cattle stations in many parts of Australia for no payment, minimal rations and miserable conditions was not only common but was for all intents and purpose sanctioned by government.

Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt surveyed conditions on cattle stations in the 1960s owned by Lord Vestey, commenting that Aboriginal people: *... owned neither the huts in which they lived nor the land on which these were built, they had no rights of tenure, and in some cases have been sold or transferred with the property.*

'ON THE CHAIN'

One morning the police came out and found our mob. They got their chain and put it around the people's necks. I don't know how many blackfellas they chained up, but it was too many. They chained up women and children too! All the people were taken down to the police station and put on trial. Barney Barnes, in *Raparapa: Stories from the Fitzroy River Drovers*, Barney Barnes (et al), ed: Paul Marshall, Magabala, 1989. p:251

The practice of using neck chains to restrain and punish Aboriginal people began in the late 1800s, and despite being banned in 1905, continued through to the mid 1900s. It was one of the most demeaning and excruciatingly painful forms of restraint imaginable, and its purpose was essentially to make it easy for station owners and police to deal with the 'natives'.

Thick metal collars, fixed around the neck, were linked to heavy chains that were then looped to the wrists. The men (and sometimes women and children) were chained to each other and taken from place to place, or left chained to a fixed rail, sometimes for long periods of time. In the early years of chaining practice, the collar-to-chain links could only be released with a hammer and chisel, the captive having to place his head on blacksmiths block while the process of breaking the link was carried out.

Chaining was not abolished entirely until 1958, when police vans with lockups came into use. The wide use of Aboriginal people being shackled in neck chains is well documented through images and official reports and stands as evidence of some of the shameful and shocking events of colonisation.

SANDSONG

'*SandSong* is a gift back to the people of the Kimberley who bore some of the darkest moments of our nation's history, yet today stand strong, proud and resilient in their cultural governance, a testament to the survival of our First Nations Peoples across Australia'.

A PRODUCTION IN FOUR ACTS

ACT 1

MAKURRA I COLD DRY SEASON

Poison

Time and space collide in a cloud of black collective consciousness, foreshadowing dark times ahead. But the Land is always present, the breathing womb of resilience.

Dry

The vibrant energy of the seasons unfolds to reveal the enduring cycle that sustains life in the Great Sandy Desert.

Skin

A young woman is guided through kinship and affirms her place amongst her skin group. She is given her name and told of her responsibilities to family, and to the women's' business knowledge that she will inherit one day.

Junta: Women's Traditional Bush Onion Dance

This traditional dance is about collecting the Junta Bush onions, cooking them, rubbing them together and finally winnowing them in the coolamon till they are clean and ready to eat and share with the family.

Totem

The men are preparing a young man for Ceremony. Through the lens of male energy, ritual transformation connects the men to their totems. The totemic shapeshifters move through the space, evolving as they reaffirm story to place, and their responsibility to the maintenance of men's sites.

Marjarrka: Men's Traditional Dance Story

This tells the true story of how Wurtuwaya (Yanpiyarti Ned Cox's grandfather) and Wirrali (Ningali Lawford-Wolf's great-grandfather)

recovered their stolen Marjarrka totemic object from a group of men who had taken it and were using it to perform their own ceremony. Wurtuwaya and Wirrali managed to retrieve the sacred totemic object, and created this important ceremonial dance, which is performed by both senior and younger men. This dance belongs to the Lawford Family, Tighe Family, Cox Family and James Family.

ACT 2

PARRANGA, HOT DRY SEASON

Coolamon

The women hunt during cold weather time. This year is different though, its dry and cold. The land is quiet and there is a drought, water and food are scarce. A meditation on fragility, survival, balance, knowledge, life and death. Spinifex

The men are carrying smoking spinifex to make a shelter. They are burning off, vaccinating, maintaining the health of Country. The old people are talking to Country, they can sense the change coming. The colonisers and their cattle have brought a dust storm with them which breaks the Land apart, displacing families.

ACT 3

KARTIYA

Auction

The land has been interrupted. Mobs have left the desert, forced to leave the memories of bush life behind them. People begin their new life as laborers and domestics, in servitude to the pastoral industry, victim to the lawlessness of a new frontier and the whims of the station owners.

Station Labour

The men toil from dawn to dusk in the stockyards, labouring in a relentless cycle, paid only in rations of food and clothing.

Build Up / Walk Off

Wet season lies in the distance, reflecting the growing tensions of the people. A cyclone is brewing as the people stand up for their rights.

Vincent Lingiari's voice fills the space, stabilising the energy, awakening the memory of the proud desert men that they once were, and giving them the strength and solidarity to walk- off the stations.

ACT 4

YITILAL, WET SEASON

Fringe

A young boy is lost, an internal storm brewing, ready to explode from social trauma and intergenerational grief. Wet season reminds him of his Grandfather and the resilience of the Lore Men who came before him. His sister steps out from the shadows of his fear, carrying the spirit to cleanse him.

Lore Time

Mobs come together for Ceremony and to begin the healing.

Karnti: Women's Traditional Bush Potato Dance

This traditional dance is about looking for the Karnti bush potato. You look everywhere with your digging stick for the roots. You see a crack in the ground and that is where the Kartni is, and you can dig it up.



Painting Mob

Painting Country brings the people closer to their desert homeland, which they have not seen for forty years. Art transports them back to their traditional lands, reconnecting and reaffirming ties to Country. This cultural awakening empowers and strengthens them to rebuild family, community and their future.

Homeland

Through oppression, multiple displacements and decades of upheaval, the spirit of people and place endures to stand strong in their kinship and belonging. They come together in wet season for Lore time when everyone gathers for Ceremony. Unbroken, the cycle continues.

Descriptions of traditional dances provided by Eva Nargoodah, Mayarn Julia Lawford and Putuparri Tom Lawford.

GLOSSARY

Walmajarri / *English*

Kartiya – *White Person*

Makurra – *Cold Season*

Parranga – *Hot, Dry Season*

Yitilal – *Wet Season*

Ngurti – *Coolamon*

Marjarrka – *Men's Traditional Cone Dance*

Karnti – *Women's Traditional Bush Potato Dance*

Junta – *Bush onion*

CREATIVE TEAM

Choreography

Stephen Page, Frances Rings and the Dancers of Bangarra Dance Theatre.

Cultural Consultants

Putuparri Tom Lawford
Eva Nargoodah

Cultural Consultancy

Wangkajunga & Walmajarri Elders

Composer

Steve Francis

Set Designer

Jacob Nash

Costume Designer

Jennifer Irwin

Lighting Designer

Nick Schlieper

AV Designer

David Bergman

[See SandSong program for creative notes and biographies of the full creative team.](#)

REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES



ONLINE

Kimberley Gwion Gwion rock art figures dated at 12,000 years.
<https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/research-highlights/kimberley-gwion-gwion-rock-art-figures-dated-12000-years>

Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment <https://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/national/west-kimberley>

Kimberley Society
<http://www.kimberleysociety.org/>

Kimberley Land Council
<https://www.klc.org.au/>

CSIRO season map of Kimberley area <https://www.csiro.au/en/research/natural-environment/land/about-the-calendars/gooniyandi>

Kimberley Region Land Tenure 2019
https://researchlibrary.agric.wa.gov.au/gis_maps/6/



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Jebb, M & Allbrook, M., 'Perspective 'First Contact'', in D Gare & D Ritter (ed), *Making Australian History: Perspectives on the past since 1788*, Thompson Learning, Melbourne 2008.

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FILM

Putuparri and the Rain Makers, Producers: Nicole Ma, John Moore. Director: Nicole Ma, 2015
<https://putuparri.com/>

Undermined: Tales from the Kimberley. Producers: Stephanie King, Nicholas Wrathall. Director: Nicholas Wrathall Amnesia Productions, 2018.
<https://underminedfilm.com/>

On Sacred Ground. Director: Oliver Howes, Film Australia, 1980
Education publications
Yiwarra Kuju: The Canning Stock Route, National Museum of Australia, 2011.

PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Below are some guiding questions and discussion points for teachers to explore with their students either before or after the performance. As well as discussion and written responses, students could explore creative responses as well, such as a visual art piece, poem or other creative writing response.

1. Refer to the list of links and further reading on page 9 and 22.
2. Consider the discussion starters on pages 13 and 16 either as a class or in small focus groups. Encourage students to scope a range of perspectives. These might emerge as conversations develop.
3. Discuss how the colonial history of the Kimberley and Great Sandy Desert areas of WA are similar and/or uniquely different from the settler history in other parts of Australia, in terms of Government policy and development of industries, as well as the relationships between Indigenous people and European settlers.
4. Beyond the critical need of water for survival, what role does this element of nature play in the spiritual connection of the people of the Kimberley with their cultural inheritance and knowledge systems?
5. Against the backdrop of Western capitalism, and changing levels of awareness and respect for First Nations knowledge, cultures and communities, what are some of the actions and strategies Indigenous people have had to initiate to survive, and what can non-Indigenous people learn from this?
6. Native title is the formal recognition by Australian law of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's traditional rights and interests in land and waters held under traditional law and custom. Research some of the key Native Title legislative events such as the Native Title Act (1993) after the Mabo decision in the High Court in 1992, and/or Wik (1996), and discuss the challenges that First Nations people encounter as they bring their cases to court.

IN RELATION TO *SANDSONG*:

7. How can Indigenous dance theatre serve as a powerful form of storytelling? Is human movement as 'language' sometimes more powerful when compared to written or spoken text? If so, why?
8. How do the dance, design and sound/music elements of *SandSong* complement each other?
9. Were there any specific sections of *SandSong* that made a particular impact on your experience of the work, stimulating a response that you weren't expecting?
10. Looking at the design features (set, costume, lighting) of *SandSong*. Were there any specific design features that you found particularly interesting, surprising and/or effective? How does this design amplify the strength of the work and/or how does it enrich the story being told?
11. How does the technical skill of the dancer support the choreography? What are some of the physical skills and attributes that dancers need to bring to the choreography?
12. How do the creative and interpretative skills of the dancer support the choreography? Do you notice anything about the dancers' focus, their capacity for adding texture to movement, and are you aware of their emotional input to the performance?



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