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AN INQUIRY STUDY ABOUT AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINALS



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In the following article, Miss Simpson outlines an inquiry study about Aboriginal Australians that she developed and followed with her sixth grade pupils.

Readers of the Journal who teach classes composed of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children may well decide to try out Miss Simpson's approach.

Those readers who teach in schools with a predominantly Aboriginal enrolment might like to reverse the emphasis and mount an inquiry study about non-Aboriginal Australians.

Aims: To help children understand the present day problems of the Aboriginal.
To show the philosophy and values of traditional tribal life.
To examine the early contacts between Aboriginal and European cultures.
To examine the role of the Aboriginal in modern Australia and to make predictions about the future.

Suitability:

This course was designed for a sixth grade with no previous group or grade experience in the techniques involved. Junior classes could use the first half of this course as a "way of life" study which could be built upon at a later stage.

Focal Questions:

- The Aboriginal:
1. WHO IS HE?
 2. HOW DOES HE SEE HIMSELF IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS WORLD?

3. HOW DOES HE SEE HIMSELF IN RELATIONSHIP TO *OUR* WORLD?
4. HAS HE A FUTURE AS AN ABORIGINAL?

INTRODUCTION

We want the children to become accurate observers, to find observable facts and later to explore reasons and relationships. We don't want them to rely on what someone else says they observed, so let us begin with the closest observable animals - ourselves!

Who am I?

Where do I live? What do I eat? What are my physical characteristics? What do I wear? How do I spend my day? What is my environment like? What skills do I possess? What tools do I own/have access to? What do I do to amuse myself? What predictions could I make about my future?

There are many ways this could be tackled. If your class is not used to discussion, print it out like a form to be filled out by each child - have the child compare with neighbour's - look for similarities and differences. Build a composite picture of a child from your class; cut out from magazines the kind of things he would eat or wear or do.

Let each child construct his life line with important happenings on it up to the present and predictions for the future.

Vocabulary will be introduced here that will be useful later: environment (natural and man-made or cultural), technology: tools (more than meets the eye), predictions: generalizations (do plenty of generalizing with the material collected but point out the dangers - find a child who does *not* fit your generalizations).

THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL : WHO IS HE?

The Aborigines:

Get the best visual material you can find for your first step: Choose a movie from the list* if you have a projector

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* See Resources.p.42.

or a strip film or slides or set of large pictures*. I prefer to use no sound track the first time. Tell the children that you are going as observers to an Aboriginal camp: all they have to do is look (no note taking) and store up questions about puzzling things they see.

Show the film.

My choice would be, *Desert People, Part II*, which shows a day in the life of a family in the Western Desert.

Be quiet as you watch; no comments; no questions.

For young children the film would be too long for one viewing. Stop it when you feel the time is right.

Use the Taba treatment to gather information and put it into categories and build a retrieval chart.

Do not make value judgements, either facial or verbal, as you collect material from the children.

Encourage the children to challenge observations they feel are faulty and add to others that are incomplete.

Compile a question bank.

Show the film a number of times. Focus on a weak area of your chart, for example, tools; look for these. Children will see more each time to add to chart. Some of your questions will be answered from further viewing. Use sound track. Set in motion research work using library, etc.

Activities.

Group and individual map making to show natural environment and to teach mapping skills.

Groups make large chart maps of Australia (work on scale involved) showing topography. Plastic overlays of rainfall lines can be made to fit over.

Group booklets with each child contributing at least one page depending on interest.

Not *all* groups will try everything. Let them decide how

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* See *Resources*.p.45.

to investigate the focal question: "Who is he?" What does he eat, use, make, see, etc.?

Booklets of food :	animals	)	
	birds	)	Emphasis on distribution
	plants	)	in relation to group
	trees	)	maps and Aboriginal
	water dwellers	)	use.
	reptiles	)	
Booklets on tools		)	

Construction of a calendar based on observation:

In Arnhem Land when  flowers  will be ripe at the yam place in the south.

When  flies over then  are coming up the rivers.

Tools and artefacts can be borrowed from the Museum for a three week period*.

Children draw, measure, weigh tools, weapons etc., record findings. Research on usage, area, materials, decoration, etc.

Children attempt to make an artefact: dilly bag (instructions available from Museum), carved river stone tjurunga, spear, woomera, arm bands, hairstring, paint brush. (My group was hopeless at first but tenacious. Their respect for "primitive" craftsmen is now enormous.)

During this period show one of the Arnhem Land films, *People of the Sea Coast*, colour movie (strip available).**

Build up chart using same headings as for desert people using Taba technique, question bank, library research.

Discussion periods using Task 2 of Taba system.

Compare/contrast two. Which areas are similar? Where do greatest differences lie? Generalize about tribal Aborigines.

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* See Resources.p.46.

** For others see Resources.p.42.

Predictions (Task 3)

What would happen to a coastal Aboriginal put down in the desert? (vice versa).

What would happen if some virus wiped out lizards? (example only).

Don't skimp or dodge this section!

Go back to your original chart on children in your class. Remake it using headings used on Aboriginal chart. Do some comparing. Project a child from the classroom chart into the Aboriginal one and reverse: get discussion going on particular questions among your groups (the smaller the group the more the members will participate). Have one group member report the group's ideas to the class.

Have some written work done on the question: Who *is* the traditional Australian Aboriginal?

Pick out the common milestones (or crises) of human experience and instigate research: how does each culture explain and cope with these? Below are some ideas my class gave after research and discussion.

<i>Aboriginal</i>	<i>White</i>
<i>BIRTH</i> Spirit children wait in bush for suitable mothers - birth casual - natural happening.	Scientific example - understood by all - hospital treatment - drama - ceremonies.
<i>SICK-NESS</i> Spells - medicine man - little diseases and pain can be transferred - broken limbs cause death.	Scientific remedies - death from sickness in youth getting rarer.
<i>PUBERTY</i> Ready for marriage (girls) - ready for secret adult rites (boys) - living separate from parents.	During school life conflicts with adults often begin. Some churches offer adult membership.
<i>MARRIAGE</i> No ceremony - arranged at birth or early childhood.	Ceremonies - legal and religious - drama - ritual.

Aboriginal

White

REPRODUCTION

Very young mothers -
babies nursed for a
long time - can't have
many - too small to
carry and share milk.

In our school, families
of 2-3 children. Short
period of natural feeding -
ceremonies.

DEATH Much outward grief -
only in old is death
by natural causes -
revenge - person often
not referred to again.

Grief - ceremonies - flowers -
black colours - remembrance.

HOW DOES HE SEE HIMSELF IN RELATION TO *HIS* WORLD?

What kind of things do you wonder about?

Where did you come from? What happens when you die? How do you
explain things around you? Why do people want to explain?
Is this unique to human animals?

Discussion around this topic could lead to research on
how different people explain the rainbow - Genesis and Noah,
Eskimo, Indian, etc.

Show one of the legend films or strips, for example,
Land of Australia : Aboriginal Culture (*Bohra the Kangaroo* and
Wyamba the Turtle) or strip film (*Bohra the Kangaroo*).

Have groups reproduce painting and research the story
(strip *Aboriginal Story Painting* - great help). Let them make
brushes as Museum kit (many books show). Read and collect
legends into booklets and tapes. Listen to music. Investigate
corroborees - invent their own. Develop games which reflect
Aboriginal beliefs or activities. Have groups evaluate the
work of other groups, deciding on criteria for evaluation first.

Class building of values chart - individual at first.
What kind of things are important to me, a child aged ----- in
197---.

Out of the muddle of things some categorizing will emerge:
material things, people, activities, ideas.

What things are common to my group? To the class?
Would these things be applicable to a tribal Aboriginal child?
If not, how would *his* chart look?

As individuals, try to project into the skin of an Aboriginal child - see if your group have ideas like yours; what does the class think?

At this stage some written ideas will help you see where children's ideas are taking them. You will have to devise written topics that suit what is happening in your classroom - could perhaps be the interpretation of a film sequence or a picture. We visited the rock engraving at Bundeena.

HOW DOES HE SEE HIMSELF IN RELATION TO *OUR* WORLD?

First contacts: Revisit the work on explorers done in early grades. Now let us examine the works of those explorers in relation to the people they met (the Aboriginals). Make a chart recording names, achievements, contacts, results; for example, Mitchell's treks involved attacks, revenge, adoption of an Aboriginal child, a court of inquiry and hostile reception for new settlers moving in.

This can be followed up, depending on the children's interest.

My children wrote radio scripts about these stories and taped them, introducing background music as required and mixing drama and narration.

Make sure the children use as many texts as possible to prepare charts or scripts - many are contradictory and it is a valuable lesson for children to learn that the written printed word is someone's point of view.

Build a time line from the Dutch traders to the present showing areas opened up to European settlement.

Some of my interested pupils undertook a major piece of research. By searching through Dr. John Cobley's record of written materials from 1788 - original diaries, letters and logbooks, they isolated the references to Aboriginals. All January references were recorded and selections from each month for the rest of 1788 were chosen and built into a booklet. We were easily able to plot the deteriorating situation for white/black relationships in this way.

Some groups used the book to isolate acts of violence, others to isolate incidents which illustrate the attitude reflected in Phillip's orders from the Crown in relation to Aboriginals.

Some children plotted an "incident map" of Sydney Harbour and we went on an excursion to try to identify the places.

Groups made further overlays for their large maps showing Aboriginal Reserves and areas of population. When looked at in relation to the topography and rainfall maps, the results are revealing.

Some children might enjoy examining present land use and finding out why Aboriginals never came to plant crops or tame animals.

Discussions of the ideas of Bill Harney's *Contact Stories**. Investigate meaning from book of "exploitation", "Paternalism", "assimilation", "separate development", "integration". Investigate fringe dwellers, city dwellers, militants.

Some film from the modern section of resources (p.44) will give you direction. *Change at Groote* recommended - it will lead you into the final section.

HAS HE A FUTURE AS AN ABORIGINAL?

The trends of your work will indicate how you should approach this. My class ran a survey among all adults we could reach in connection with the Federal election asking what the various parties had promised to do for Aboriginals if elected. When results were tabulated 80% had said they had no idea. We drew the conclusion that affluent urban dwellers don't care much.

My children have not "finished" ABORIGINALS. I feel they have just begun a lifelong interest.

RESOURCES

16mm movie film from Visual Aids Centre, 5 Condor Street, Burwood, N.S.W. Your school has a catalogue and order book. Films need to be ordered in advance.

Desert People (919.4(22)). Made for Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1965. Superb black and white film recreating daily life of desert

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*See Resources.p.47.

dwellers in Western Central Australia. The two families portrayed have only "come in" from traditional nomadic living 12 months before. (6 copies available)

Part I, Djagamara's Family: Short introduction to families involved, relationships explained, weapon making, digging out dried up wells, seed gathering - husking, winnowing, grinding, cooking.

Part II, Mirma's family: Daily trek, food gathering, camping and cooking at night, family roles etc. (Best of the two if you are only seeing one).

Lighting a Fire: (10 mins B/W). Self contained short piece same family as above. Method - edge of woomera on a cracked log, powdered kangaroo dung the initial fuel. (13 copies available).

Making a Spear: (10 mins B/W). Similarly self contained from *Desert People* - from selection of tree to finished (crude) product. (13 copies available).

Neither of these sequences appear in Parts I and II of Desert People.

A number of reels were made recording all details of desert life. Many of these deal with rites sacred to the tribes and are not for publication.

At time of printing (Jan'73) the films listed above were not in the general catalogue but you may still apply for them. If unavailable, the films below are suitable. Try to see both coastal and inland material.

Tjurunga: (19 copies) Excellent colour film of Central Australian Nomads - Ayers Rock area. Ritual and stories associated with Tjurungas cooking of emus - increase ceremonies - children at play.

Walkabout: (11 copies) This film accompanies *Tjurunga*. Both were made by Charles Mountford on an expedition to Central Australia. Cooking a kangaroo - making up ceremonies - ritual dancing - *Ceremony of Kangaroo*. The book *Brown Men and Red Sand* by Charles Mountford was written on this expedition and reading it will give you a lot of background on the films and the Aborigines who appear.

Aborigines of the Sea Coast (20 mins - 18 copies available) Colour film of Arnhem Land - Yirrkalla people, Gove Peninsular. Canoe making in detail, turtle cooking, children playing water games, bark shelters (rain and mosquitoes), nothing on women's role.

Art of the Hunter (16 mins - 13 copies) Colour film of Arnhem Land - hunting, preparation and cooking of kangaroo, weapons.

Land of Australia (11 mins - 13 copies) Aboriginal Culture - Colour film. Two legends beautifully created from images taken from bark and rock painting. *Wyamba the Turtle* (highly recommended) and *Bohra the Kangaroo*.

Pattern of Life (26 mins - 17 copies) Colour film designed for secondary students but suitable for seniors. I would advise using sections of it. Body and facial decoration for ceremonies/mourning, Tiwi People (islands of Northern Territory coast, Darwin area. Bark painting - closeups of artists at work and explanations by the artists of their works. (use in conjunction with Museum Kit - *Aboriginal Art*)

The Dreaming (20 mins 16 copies) Secondary art film in colour, only suitable for children who are really involved - could bore others. The film moves from one rock painting to another evoking a strange feeling of unity of viewer with the landscape. "Dreamtime" quality.

White Clay and Ochre (20 mins - 10 copies) Colour film for secondary students. Techniques of Museum researchers recording painting in western New South Wales.

Wirridd-Wirridd (10 mins) Colourful legend told using rock paintings - coming of fire.

MODERN PROBLEMS

Change at Groote A long but excellent film for the concluding part of unit. The manganese industry - youth vs age and tradition - the bulldozer and sacred rites. There is a fascinating commentary, parts of which could be taped for discussion. Comments by Aborigines, young and old. The missionary, insulated white woman etc. as complementing the images but not explaining them.

Esperance Story, Aborigines of Australia: problems, One Man's Road, Walking in Sunlight/Walking in Shadow. I haven't seen any of these

but they are available though not listed in the old catalogue.

OTHER FILMS FROM BURWOOD WHICH COULD BE SUITABLE

Australian Walkabout (25 mins - black and white) Contrast of two families, one Aboriginal one white, camped at the same billabong.

Crocodile Hunters (11 mins - black and white) Contrast of hunting methods - Aboriginal/European.

Arnhem Land (10 mins - sound - black and white) Visit of National Geographic Society collecting specimens, filming art (Chasm Island), bark canoe, corroboree.

STRIP FILMS AVAILABLE FROM BURWOOD BUT PROBABLY IN YOUR SCHOOL COLLECTION ALREADY

Aborigines of the Inland Rather old fashioned in look but useful sketches illustrating routine life in desert, *some* good photos and suggested activities.

Everyday life Among the Australian Aborigines Colour - life, art objects, daily activities (catalogue does not state region).

Aboriginal Art Story Pictures Essential viewing. Notes are as good as the strip - don't miss them. If you have the equipment it would be worth putting notes on tape. Bark paintings are reproduced and interpreted. There are also frames for students to interpret.

Elements of Aboriginal Art Embracing weapons, implements etc.

Bohra the Kangaroo (can be purchased - 75c to libraries) beautifully evoked legend in colour. Well worth buying.

The Firebird Legend of Wirritt-Wirritt the fire bringer (listed as infant material).

KITS AVAILABLE FROM AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM : Ask for Education Officer - book in advance - three week loan delivered by rail.

String Contains various fibres used in stringmaking. Complete instructions (with models) on making dilly bags, ceremonial objects made of string and feathers, set of large pictures related to theme of kit, set of slides (general), leaflets.

Australian Aboriginal Art Contains brushes, ochres, bark paintings, several carved tchurungas, a copy of a mould from a rock engraving, set of pictures on theme, set of slides (general), leaflets, etc.

Stone Weapons Flints, spear heads, Axeheads, set of pictures, colour slides, leaflets, etc.

Also available - collection of artefacts, weapons, tools, etc., all authentic.

RECORDING

Arnhem Land - H.M.V. Volume I. Authentic Australian Aboriginal songs and dances, collected by Professor A.P. Elkin.

TAPES

My own tapes of didjeridoo and some singing are available for copy by writing direct to me.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

This bibliography is incomplete but all books listed were used by the class in the study, many from our own library, many from public libraries. *Books which proved of particular value to us.

FOR TEACHERS

Department of Interior. *Land and the Aborigine of the Northern Territory.*

Harney, W. : *Brimming Billabongs.* Story in first person of life in two cultures told to Bill Harney by Aboriginal of Arnhem coast.

*Meggitt, M.J. : *Desert People.* Angus and Robertson. Detailed study of Walbiri people, neighbours of Gurinji of Wattie Creek. Good background for an *adult reader*, also description of local plants and uses.

Mountford, C. : *Brown Men and Red Sands.* Sunbooks. Description of expedition to Ayers Rock and Olgas, accompanies films, *Walkabout* and *Tchurunga.*

Rowley, C.D. : *Destruction of Aboriginal Society, The Remote Australians, Outcasts in White Society.* Pelican Books.

LEGENDS

- *Harney, W.E. : *Tales from the Aborigines*. Robert Hale.
- *Langloh-Parker : *Australian Legendary Tales*. Angus and Robertson.
- Mountford, C. : *The Dreamtime,*
The Dawn of Time,
The First Sunrise. Rigby. Collected by
Mountford. Beautiful European style interpretive paintings
by A. Roberts.
- Norledge : *Aboriginal Legends of Eastern Australia*. Reed
- Reed, A.W. : *Myths and Legends of Australia*. Reed
- Reeves : *Legends of Moonie Jarl*. Jacaranda
- *Robinson : *Legend and Dreaming (Arnhem Land)* Edward/Shaw
- Robinson, R. : *Wandjina*. Jacaranda
- Wells : *Skies of Arnhem Land*. Angus and Robertson.

ART AND ARTEFACTS

- *Baglin/Mullins : *Aboriginal Art in Australia*. Horwitz
- *Edwards/Guerin : *Aboriginal Bark Painting*. Rigby
- *McCarthy : *Australian Aboriginal Stone Implements,*
Australian Aboriginal Rock Art,
Australian Aboriginal Decorative Art. Australian
Museum.

Leaflets available from the Australian Museum:

Australian Aboriginal Boomerangs,
Australian Aboriginal Culture,
Aboriginal Relics of New South Wales.

GENERAL

- *Baglin : *The Dark Australians*.
- Baglin/Mullins : *Australia's Northern Territory*. Horwitz
- Coble, J. (Ed) : *The Sydney Cove - Original Diaries 1788*.
Hodder and Hamlyn
- Copper : *Australian Aboriginal Words*. South Australian Museum.
- *Edwards/Guerin : *Arnhem Land in Colour*
- Elkin : *The Aboriginal Australians and How to Understand Them*.
Longman.

- *Joy : *The Explorers*
- *Papps : *Aboriginal Words of Australia.*
- *Poignant : *Piccaninni Walkabout.* (Photos). Angus and Robertson.
- *Reed : *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Life.* Reed.
(ESSENTIAL : but beware of generalizations)
- *Rose : *Ngari the Hunter.* (Central Australia) Collins.
- *Wallace : *Children of the Desert.* Nelson.
- The Aborigine Today.* Hamlyn.
- U.N.E.S.C.O. *Answering Your Questions on Aborigines.*
Australian Museum.

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Halls Creek

LANGUAGE AND READING

J. Fleming,
Hall's Creek School. W.A.

Mr. Fleming reports on two approaches - one with a group of young children and one with a group of older non-readers.

The Halls Creek School in Western Australia is classified as a Special Native School because of the large complement of Aboriginal children in attendance (90% of 200 total school enrolment).

The children come from a variety of situations - reserve, cattle stations, transitional home areas and normal government housing quarters, but mainly from the first two mentioned areas.

Their knowledge of English is varied but on the whole their language competence is substantially below that of their European/Australian counterparts. There is a similar discrepancy in their knowledge/experience of the modern world and in fact any situation outside their own local environment.