Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Cultures

A Presentation by Roslyn Green

Videos: YouTube and the ABC
Pictures: Wikimedia and Pixabay
List of Resources

• **Short Video:** Australia’s First People (Slide 4)
• **Article:** How to get to Australia…50,000 years ago (Slide 6)
• **The Guardian:** “First humans to reach Australia…” (map on Slide 6)
• **Text:** Oxford Big Ideas, chapter 7
• **Website:** The Meriam People of Murray Island in the Torres Strait (Slides 17-18)
• **Website:** Interactive Aboriginal Language Map (Slide 20)
• **Video:** Our Mother Tongue - Woiwurrung (Slide 24)
• **SBS on Demand - Video:** The Dreaming (Slide 27)
• **Website Article:** Understanding Aboriginal Dreamings (Slide 26-27)
• **Video:** Behind the News - Mungo Man (Slide 36)
• **Website Article:** Mungo Man (Slide 36)
• **ABC Video:** World’s First Bakers? (Slide 7)
• **Alinta the Flame** from the “Women of the Sun” series - available through Click View (would be a lovely conclusion to the unit)
First of all, we shall discover how the first peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands made the long and perilous journey to our ancient land.
Australia’s First Peoples - Link to This Video
Key Dates and Events
See also *Oxford Big Ideas*, Chapter 7, pp.222-223

Historians believe that Homo sapiens reached Australia at least **60,000 years ago.**

The indigenous people of Tasmania are believed to have travelled there through eastern Australia about **40,000 years ago.**

About **12,000** years ago, at the end of the last Ice Age, Bass Strait was flooded and Tasmania cut off from the mainland.
How did the first Australians come?

The red route is considered the more likely one. See this article.
Draw up to four “Devil’s Marbles” in your notebook (see the next slide). Then discuss what kind of evidence might be used to reach conclusions about the first Australians, their journey and their way of life in ancient Australia. Write down your ideas.
Draw up to four “Devil’s Marbles” in your notebook. Discuss and write down what kind of evidence might be used to reach conclusions about the first Australians, their journey and their way of life in ancient Australia.
Evidence About Australia’s Ancient History

My Suggestions

Scientific methods such as mapping the sea floor, computer modelling, and simulating the first journey

Rock paintings, some of which have been dated to more than 40,000 years old

Evidence gained from archaeological digs and studies of fossils

Evidence from artefacts such as ancient tools

The historical evidence continues to grow with more archaeological studies, new techniques such as computer modelling, and more sophisticated dating methods. As a result, our knowledge is far more accurate now than it was even fifty years ago.

artefact: an object of historical or cultural importance, made by a human being
Dig Deeper…

Read this website article in order to answer the following questions:

1. Roughly how long ago did Aboriginal people first arrive in Australia? On what kind of evidence is this dating based?

2. Complete this sentence with the four accurate words below: The migration of the ancestors of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was...

   - deliberate
   - accidental
   - coordinated
   - unorganised
   - purposeful
   - easy
   - challenging
   - unintentional

3. What is the estimate of the founding population?

Check your answers on Slide 14.
Quick Knowledge Check

① Place these 3 events in chronological order:
Tasmania cut off from the mainland; the first Australians arrive here; the first indigenous people travel to Tasmania.

② Which term below matches each definition?

a. a simple word for an archaeological excavation
b. an object of cultural importance made by human beings
c. a synonym for the word “native”
d. the term for scientifically modern human beings
e. the remains or an impression of a prehistoric plant or animal

Check your answers on Slide 37.

artefact • dig • fossil • Homo sapiens • indigenous
Next, we shall learn about how Australia’s diverse environments influenced the cultures of the first Australians.

The Oldest Living Cultures on Earth
What can we learn from Australia’s First Peoples?

Think • Pair • Share

Draw four or five of the Twelve Apostles in your workbook. Work with a friend to discuss this question and fill in each “Apostle” with an idea.
What can we learn from Australia’s First Peoples?

Think • Pair • Share

Work with a friend to discuss this question and fill in each “Apostle” with an idea.
What can we learn from Australia’s First Peoples?

Think • Pair • Share

- Their cultures, including their Dreamtime stories, their ways of life, their values and beliefs, their creative art, and their languages.
- How they lived in harmony with the land, sustaining their own lifestyle and protecting the environment for future generations.
- Their knowledge of native plants and animals.
- How their extended family and kinship system provided stability and protection.

Some of my suggestions on this topic...
Describe what you notice about Australia's environments and climates.
Diverse Environments, Diverse Cultures

Read from *Oxford Big Ideas*, pp.224-225: “The Climate and Environment of Australia”. Use the information to create the infographic on the next slide.

Turn your workbook so that there is a landscape page in front of you. Either **hand-draw** a map of Australia while looking closely at pp.224-225 - or **trace** one.

*Additional resource for super fast readers:* Find out more about the Meriam people at [this link](#).
Create a simple **infographic** to show how the environments and climates of ancient Australia affected people’s way of life.

- **The climate and environment** in which each group lived influenced:
  - 
  - 
  - 

- Note the number of islands in the Torres Strait (p.224).

- Write details about the **Meriam** people of Murray Island in the Torres Strait (p.225).

- Write details about the **Pitjantjatjara** people of central Australia.

- Write details about the **Wurundjeri** people of the Melbourne region (p.225).

See my sample version on Slide 44.
Our next topic is Aboriginal languages. They were and are central to the culture, identity and sense of belonging of the first peoples. In this part of the presentation, we shall gain an appreciation of the diversity and importance of Aboriginal languages.
Language Groups in Ancient Australia

Activities

• Read the text on p.226 and fill in the details on the next slide.
• Look closely at pages 226-227 of Oxford Big Ideas, which shows a map of the many languages spoken in ancient Australia.
• Study the interactive version of the map at this link: Interactive Aboriginal Language Map closely. Can you find the following?
  * the Woiwurrung language, spoken by the Wurundjeri people;
  * the area where the Pitjantjatjara people live;
  * the name of the Meriam people’s language.
Key Information About the Aboriginal Peoples and Their Language Groups

Essential Notes (p.226):

a Approximate number of different languages spoken in ancient Australia:

b Number of languages when one factors in the dialects and regional variations:

c Number of indigenous people who lived in Australia before European occupation:

d Number of people in Australia today who identify as indigenous:

See my answers on Slide 45.
Think, Pair, Share:
Why are languages so important? Why might it be important to preserve them?
Think, Pair, Share:

After watching the video on the next slide, in which Joy Wandin Murphy, an elder of the Wurundjeri people, speaks about her life and the Woiwurrung language, add some extra ideas to your “post-it” notes.
Video: Our Mother Tongue - Woiwurrung

This video can also be viewed at this link.
Why are languages so important? Why might it be important to preserve them?

- Languages are an essential part of our rituals, ceremonies and celebrations.
- Languages are keys to our identity. They help us to feel that we belong.
- Languages reflect our world view. They allow us to tell our stories in poems, jokes and plays.
- They also allow us to define, explain and understand the society and people we belong to.
- Languages allow us to describe our environments and experiences. They permit us to reveal our true selves.
- Languages permit us to tell stories, express beliefs and spread knowledge.
The next subject is the Dreaming. We shall explore the belief systems of Aboriginal people and discover how their ideas about the Dreaming influence their relationship with the land, their law, and their world view.

Resources:
Oxford Big Ideas text, pp. 230-231
SBS on Demand - Video: The Dreaming
Website Article: Understanding Aboriginal Dreamings
The Dreaming

Read from *Oxford Big Ideas*, p.230: “Aboriginal Culture and Beliefs - The Dreaming”. Write an appropriate heading in your workbook.

Next, dot around your hand. Use this graphic to write notes, as explained on the next 2 slides.

• **Additional resource for super fast readers:**
  Find out more about the Dreaming at this link: [Understanding Aboriginal Dreamings](#)
Some ancient and mysterious Aboriginal rock art shows **hand prints created with stencils**.

- Use your own hand to create notes about the Dreaming.
- Draw around your hand and **write one key idea or belief about the spirit ancestors next to each finger**.
- See the next slide for an example of how to set out your page.
They shaped landforms such as mountains and rivers.
The Concept of Worldview

In the next section we shall explore what this means and consider how differing peoples’ perspectives vary.
A Different Worldview

Your **worldview** is your conception of how the world, your society and your environment fit together. It affects what you believe, how you interpret events and how you make judgements about others.

Your **worldview** is your perspective on the world.

It is influenced by your parents, your schooling, your religious views (or lack of them) and your experiences.
A Different Worldview

The “European” worldview is different from that of many indigenous peoples, including the Aboriginal peoples of Australia.

Read from *Oxford Big Ideas*, p.231: “Different Views of the World”. This will help you to gain an insight into differing worldviews.

Create a table in your workbook as on the next slide. Select which key words and phrases from the next slide belong under each category: European or Indigenous?
A Different View of the World

A European Worldview

Measurement, assessment, analysis

A focus on “progress” and change

Culture based on writing

Custodians of the land

Science-based

A focus on continuity

Owners of the land

The land is shared and is central to spiritual beliefs.

A European Worldview

Law based on the Dreaming

Knowledge is passed on orally

A culture based on sharing

Value is placed on individual possession
In the next section, we shall investigate how historians, archaeologists and students investigate the ancient past.
How We Investigate the Ancient Past

Read from *Oxford Big Ideas*, pp 232-235. Focus especially on p. 233 “Mungo Lady and Mungo Man” and p.234 about searching for evidence through archaeological excavations.

Create a glossary or a glossary column and define these words:

- oral tradition (p.231)
- archaeology
- midden (p.235)
- carbon dating
Video: Behind the News - Mungo Man
Website Article: Mungo Man
Dossier: Mungo Man

Use the silhouette figure on the next page as your starting point - or draw your own figure. Add details about Mungo Man based on the video, your text and extra reading.

Mungo Man Essential Details:

- Carbon dating:
- Height:
- Age at time of death:
- Health issues:
- Found in:
- Dental irregularities:
- Details of burial:
- Importance of discovery:
Seeking Evidence Through Archaeology

An ABC Video: World’s First Bakers?
Aboriginal Grinding Stones
The Staple Food of the Wurundjeri People - explained by Bruce Pasoce

The Story of the Yam Daisy or Murnong... from this link
Roughly how long ago did Aboriginal people first arrive in Australia? On what kind of evidence is this dating based? Northern Territory = as early as 65,000 years ago; Western Australia = approximately 50,000 years ago; South Australia = approximately 49,000 years ago

Complete this sentence with the four accurate words below: The migration of the ancestors of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders was...

deliberate
coordinated
purposeful
challenging

What is the estimate of the founding population? Estimates range from 1000 to 3000 people.
Quick Knowledge Check: Answers

① Place these 3 events in chronological order:
(3) Tasmania cut off from the mainland; (1) the first Australians arrive here; (2) the first indigenous people travel to Tasmania.

② Which term below matches each definition?

a. a simple word for an archaeological excavation - **dig**
b. an object of cultural importance made by human beings - **artefact**
c. a synonym for the word “native” - **indigenous**
d. the term for scientifically modern human beings - **Homo sapiens**
e. the remains or an impression of a prehistoric plant or animal - **fossil**
The Impact of Diverse Environments on the First Peoples’ Way of Life

Quick Infographic

There are over 200 islands in the Torres Strait.

The climate and environment in which each group lived influenced:
- what kind of food they gathered;
- which animals they hunted;
- their hunting methods;
- the clothing they wore;
- the kinds of shelters needed.

The Meriam People of Murray Island:
- lived as fishers, divers and traders;
- ate a great deal of seafood as well as turtles and dugong (a marine mammal or “sea cow”);
- grew yams (a kind of tuber) and collected other foods.

The Pitjantjatjara people of central Australia:
- lived in a hot, arid climate;
- found water in trees and plants;
- hunted animals such as kangaroos and goannas;
- continue to speak their ancestral language and to protect their sacred sites.

The Wurundjeri People based around the Melbourne region:
- wore possum fur cloaks in the winter;
- ate the staple food called the “murnong”, a kind of root vegetable or tuber;
- hunted for kangaroos and set river traps for fish;
- built themselves dome-shaped shelters.
Essential Notes (p.226):

a Approximate number of different languages spoken in ancient Australia:

b Number of languages when one factors in the dialects and regional variations:

c Number of indigenous people who lived in Australia before European occupation:

d Number of people in Australia today who identify as indigenous:
The Role of the Spirit Ancestors in the Dreaming…

They shaped landforms such as mountains and rivers.

They gave the people their law and customs.

They created the people, animals and vegetation.

The Dreaming continues… The spirit ancestors live on in the sacred sites. The Dreaming is connected to place rather than time.

They created the ceremonies through which the Aboriginal people express their beliefs - in song, dance and rituals.

They live on in the land, the rivers, the sky, the landforms and the people. The Dreaming is never-ending.