

# Aboriginal Dreaming

In this unit students explore Aboriginal Australia through improvisation, movement, storytelling and readers' theatre and make links with learning in English, Human Society and Its Environment and in the other arts.

Students can learn about Aboriginal Australia through the integration of Aboriginal perspectives in informative and stimulating ways. Through the arts, students can further develop their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal cultural and heritage.

The arts in schools are divided into subjects: music, dance, and visual arts. Aboriginal Australian arts are viewed not separately but as an inter-related aspect of Aboriginal peoples' lives. Ceremonial life, song, dance and storytelling explain creation, spirituality and beliefs. Aboriginal arts are the binding force of a continuum between the past, present and future for Aboriginal people.

*In this unit students will:*

- sustain and build belief in roles
- use elements of drama to create effects
- show the development of movement and language skills
- form opinions about drama.

## Drama forms

- improvisation
- movement
- storytelling
- reader's theatre

## Resources Books

- Adams, Jeanie (1993). *Pigs and Honey*. Ashton Scholastic, Gosford
- Adams, Jeanie (1993). *Going for oysters*. Ashton Scholastic, Gosford
- Davis, Jack (1986). *Honey Spot*. Currency Press, Sydney
- Kidd, Diana (1992). *The fat and juicy place*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney
- Mattingley, Christobel (1993). *Tucker's mob*. Ashton Scholastic, Gosford
- NSW Board of Studies (1997). *Big Mob Books for Little fullas*: NSW Board of Studies, Sydney and especially *Teacher's Handbook: Big Mob Books for little fullas. Emergent Readers Kit*.

## Learning activities

### Getting started

- Collect and display a variety of Aboriginal stories.
- Teacher can read and discuss stories e.g. *What is the story about? Who are the characters? Who is telling the story? Why?*
- Explore what a Dreaming story is (see reference); relate to stories from other cultures.
- Explore how Aboriginal people pass on their culture e.g. dance, music, art.
- Ask students if they know of any other stories e.g. from *Big Mob Books* or Ashton Scholastic kit.
- Invite an Aboriginal speaker or Aboriginal performers to share local Dreaming stories.



## The Dreaming

Dreaming is the “embodiment of Aboriginal creation which gives meaning to everything” (*Aboriginal Studies Syllabus Years 7-10*, Board of Studies NSW, 1993, p. 49)

Dreaming is a non-Aboriginal word. Each language group has its own word to describe the complexity of Dreaming.

It is important that Dreaming stories are used properly in the classroom and not misinterpreted as fairy stories or myths. Dreaming stories are the binding force of a continuum between the past, present and the future for Aboriginal people. Dreaming stories explain creation, and deal with the responsibilities of the people to care for their land and each other. These stories are multilayered in meaning, and as a child grows and matures, a greater depth of meaning is revealed.

It is important that the Aboriginal children from the school in which you teach know generally about Dreaming stories and, in particular and where possible, know Dreaming stories from their own country.

Teachers should be aware that some Aboriginal students may find it difficult to know their own family history. Even though it is difficult - and painful in some cases - to trace the past, Aboriginal children should (if at all possible) know the language groups to which they belong. Teachers should encourage all students to value their past and present identity. Students should know the name of, and respect, the language group in which the school is situated.

Teachers should be sensitive to the fact that children’s parents and grandparents may belong to the “stolen generation” and may find their links difficult to trace. Encouragement and community knowledge about family names can help to build a strong individual identity.

If Dreaming stories are recorded in any way, permission to record them beforehand must be sought from both the Aboriginal storyteller and the Elders of the area from which the Dreaming story came. If Dreaming stories are published, copyright must always remain with the community from which the Dreaming story came.

Extract from: Board of Studies NSW (1997). *Teachers Handbook: Big Mob Books for Little fullas. Emergent Readers Kit*. Board of Studies NSW, Sydney pp. 22-23.

### • Taking on roles in situations • Developing drama • Performing

- As a class, select and allocate roles for this story. Students create small groups where appropriate. They form a circle to represent the performance space. Decide on the location of characters within this space.
- Decide on simple items to help represent the characters. Allocate time to develop these.
- Teacher uses text as a guide. Students enter the circle in role and enact the story as the teacher reads it. Stop at regular intervals and discuss. Experiment with ideas. Teacher and rest of class assist with suggestions on how to focus their work e.g. *In what direction are you moving and looking? How big are your movements? How fast or slow are they? What effect do you want?*
- The class observes as students present work inside the circle. Discuss ways to improve and structure group work and the whole piece. *Where is the focus of the scene? How can we use contrast between different types of movement to improve the scene? How can gesture be used more effectively? How can sounds and voices be added to our story? What is the mood of the scene? Where should the storyteller be?*
- Continue to build and make changes to improve the piece. Make final decisions and rehearse.
- Perform for another class. Video the performance.

*Variation:*

- Use music to introduce or underscore some of the action if desired.
- Allocate student narrators to tell the story.



## Responding

- Discuss the work. *Were the roles and situation clear and convincing? How could it be improved? Where was there tension in the piece? Where was the focus? How were space and contrast used effectively? How did the use of symbols help to tell the story?*
- Students write in their drama journals about the process of working with others in developing the piece. Include designs of items developed for the performance.

## Assessment of students

- Teacher observation of students' drama including their process of working.
- Analysis of video.
- Analysis by the teacher of students' oral and written comments, drawings and other responses to their drama work.
- Consideration of the following questions about students' learning in drama:
  - ♦ How well are they able to sustain and build belief in roles? How convincing are they? How effectively do they sustain roles while interacting with others?
  - ♦ What evidence is there that students are using drama elements to create effects as they work with others to develop drama? How was tension developed? How was mood created? Which symbols were explored in this piece? How effectively are students working together?
  - ♦ What evidence is there that students are developing movement and language skills? Which particular skills were developed in this unit? How well were students able to use voice, gesture and different types of movement to communicate their ideas? Which movement and language skills need further development?
  - ♦ What opinions about drama are students forming? What other learning in drama is evident as they observe and respond to their drama and the drama of others?
- Consideration of the following questions about other learning:
  - ♦ How has the drama contributed to the students' understanding of the text?
  - ♦ How have specific reading, writing, talking and listening skills been developed?
  - ♦ How has the drama work contributed to the students' understanding of Aboriginal culture?

## Extension activities

- Explore techniques used in movement, dance and storytelling. The performers may discuss the significance of their location for their performances. Discuss and write about observations.
- Explore Aboriginal artworks as a basis for further improvisation. Students tell a story to a small group, based on ideas suggested by an artwork. Interview a student in role as someone or something represented in an artwork. Have that student talk about the situation depicted in the artwork.

