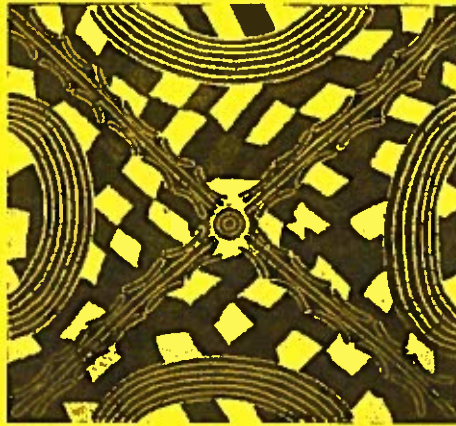




ABORIGINAL ART

Australian Aborigines see themselves as belonging to the land and having to care for it. Aborigines believe they are part of the rhythm of life and the earth. Much of their artwork shows that rhythm, as can be seen in these fine examples:

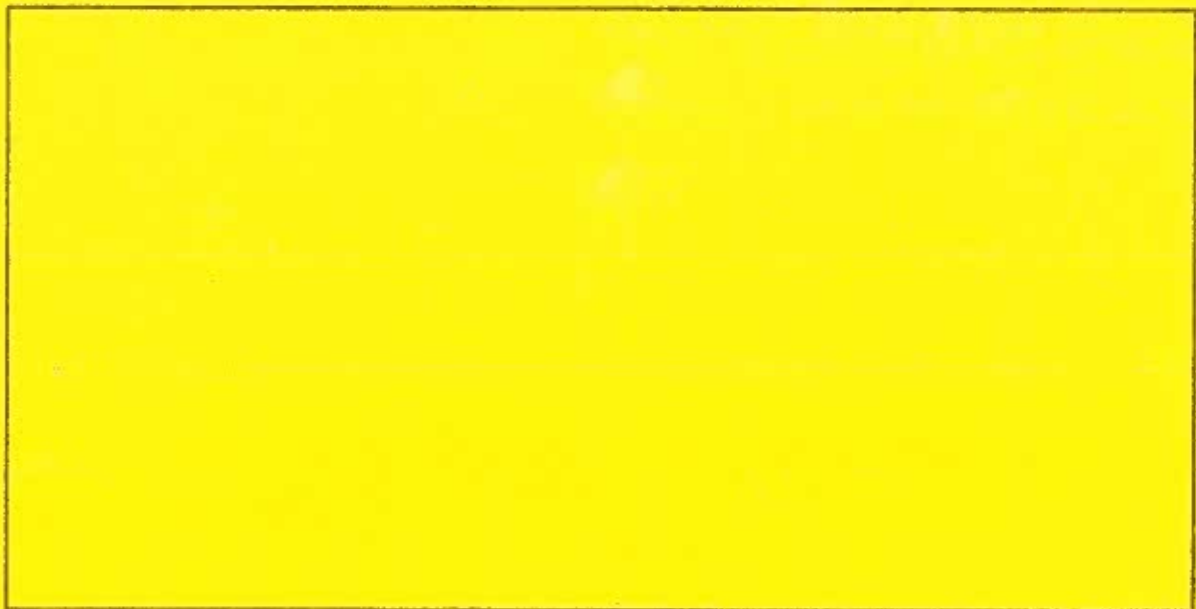


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Though today many paintings are on canvas or wood and made to last, originally such "paintings" were done in the sand and only lasted until the wind blew. Others were and still are painted on bark, on ceremonial objects, or on didgeridoos. Didgeridoos, like the one shown here, are traditional musical instruments that have been used by the Aborigines for thousands of years.



DIRECTIONS: Patterns are commonly found in Australian Aboriginal art. Create your own version of a "traditional" Aboriginal pattern below:





Songlines of the Australian Aborigines

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Australia is a vast, dry land, but Aborigines live comfortably and find their way effortlessly around what many people see as “wasteland.” The Outback with its few waterholes is home to many groups of indigenous people in Australia. What looks like empty desert and fields of dead grass, the Aborigines know well and understand. It has been said that, “No one has ever met a lost Aborigine.” They move on the land as though they are part of it, because they are.

The many tribes of Aborigines, each with its own language and culture, all share a strong tie to the land. They believe that their spirits and those of their ancestors are part of its energy. They find their way based on the history they share with it, a history that is recorded in songs that have been sung for thousands of years.

When Aborigines give directions, they sing what they call “songlines.” Songlines tell stories of the past or “Dreamtimes.” Dreamtime stories tell about their ancestors, their people, and the land. For example if one Aborigine is telling another where to find a certain kind of crystal, he may sing a song that tells of a great ancestor and some important event in that person’s life that occurred there. They sing of Uluru, the huge sandstone rock, and how the ancestors created it. It is not at all uncommon for different tribes to share the same songs because of past contacts among them.

Aborigines do not describe places in terms of roads or cities. They give directions using landmarks and events that occurred nearby, and many stories may describe a single place. A mountain could be the place of a large fire, some heroic deed, the birthplace of an ancestor, or where two tribes fought or made peace.

DIRECTIONS: Write directions to a place in your home, school, or neighborhood using stories of landmarks and events. See if others can guess where they lead.





Legend of the Great Flood



Stories and legends are very important in the culture of the Australian Aborigines. This is one example of the many stories passed down from generation to generation.

Long ago in the Dreamtime a terrible drought fell upon the land. Flowers died, the grass withered, and the creeks and water holes dried. The sun shone bright in the sky and the only darkness on earth was night and that which came with death.

After many had died, a great council of animals met to discover the cause of the misery. They learned that a great frog had swallowed all of the water and decided the only way to get the water back was to make the frog laugh. Many animals tried and failed.

First the Kookaburra, seated on the limb of a tree, looked straight at the bloated frog and began to laugh. He laughed so hard he almost fell off his branch, but the frog only looked at him and blinked. Next a frill-lizard tried. It puffed out its jaws and the frill around its neck and ran up and down the tree, but the frog hardly noticed. The animals started arguing about the problem and how it should be solved until an eel spoke, asking for a try at making the frog laugh.

The eel wiggled right in front of the frog, slowly and then faster until he was flopping around like a grub in a red ant bed. As the head and tail of the eel met, the frog relaxed and began to laugh. Water poured from his mouth and filled the land. So much water flowed, that a great flood covered the land until only the mountaintops could be seen.

The Ancestor who was a pelican at the time rescued people one by one until he saw a beautiful woman. He continued to rescue the men, a few at a time. When the woman asked him to take her with the men he replied, "I will take you next time," but he didn't. The woman realized that the pelican was planning to take her with him to his camp and made a plan to escape from him.

While the pelican was away, she ran into the bush. When the pelican returned and realized she was gone, he grew very angry. He painted himself with white clay and set out to find the man he believed must have kidnapped her. When he met another pelican, it did not recognize the white creature and hit it with a club, killing it. Since that time pelicans have been black and white as a means of remembering the Great Flood.

How is this flood legend different from others you have heard or read?

This Story	Other Flood Legend(s)

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Past and Present



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Many thousands of years ago, people came to the land of Australia. Large sheets of ice covered the earth and sea levels were perhaps 500 feet or more lower than they are now. The People came from Asia across land and shallow water. Many came into this new land and moved into different areas, over time forming their own cultures based upon where they lived. Life on the coasts centered on fishing and gathering. Inland, where the land was dry, The People hunted and gathered.

By the time Europeans arrived in Australia, more than 600 groups, each with its own language, lived on the island continent. The Europeans changed the lives of The People forever. Smallpox and other diseases killed many of them, and the white men took their lands. As the number of white people grew, the number of Aborigines declined. Some groups were wiped out altogether.

When Australia broke away from the United Kingdom in 1901, the Aborigines were few in number and treated very badly. They were forced to "fit into" Australian society. Missionaries taught them the religion of the white people, Aborigines worked for whites in low-paying jobs, and children were taken from their families to be brought up in white households. Aborigines had few rights, no land, and no voice in the government.

Today their situation has improved somewhat. In 1976 and 1993, laws were passed giving the Aborigines the right to own land and court cases have supported their rights to fair treatment. Today many Aborigines are fighting for their rights. There is an Aboriginal senator, many organizations work to gain rights, and sports stars and other public figures are speaking out. At the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Cathy Freeman attracted world attention by becoming the first Aboriginal person to win a gold medal.

Though things are improving, there is much to be done in the fight for equality for the Aborigines. Unemployment, low incomes, alcoholism, poor health care and education, and low life expectancies remain problems. There is little question that Australia's Aborigines still do not have equal opportunity.

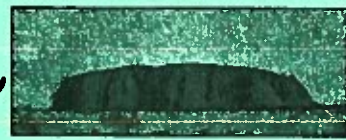
What is ONE thing you think Aborigines should do to gain equal rights in Australia? Explain why you think your suggestion would work.

1





Dreamtime



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The religion of Australia’s many groups of indigenous people is based on Dreaming. When Aborigines speak of Dreaming, though, they are not talking about going to sleep and thinking about stories. Their Dreaming is the story of the creation of the earth and everything on it. The Aborigines believe that the world began as a shapeless mass waiting to be formed into what it is today. Then the Ancestors came and traveled the face of the earth, creating.

The Ancestors took many forms, though most were great snakes. These Ancestors are gods that are, in a way, ancient family members. They traveled the world, shaping the land and creating new life wherever they went. The Aborigines believe that, as creations of the Ancestors, the blood of the gods flows through the earth, the people, and all life. Therefore, the earth and all things on it are related.

In Australia every natural feature is explained by at least one Dreamtime story. Stories are very important in the culture of the Aborigines and are passed down from generation to generation. ~~Over time more and more stories have been added to the oral histories of the various tribes.~~

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Directions: Aborigines believe that Uluru, or Ayers Rock as it is known to Westerners, was created by the Ancestors. Uluru, (*pictured above*) is a huge sandstone rock more than 1000 feet high and about 5 miles around. Using what you learned in the passage and your imagination, make up a “Dreamtime Story” to explain how Uluru was formed. Be prepared to share your story with the class.

3

