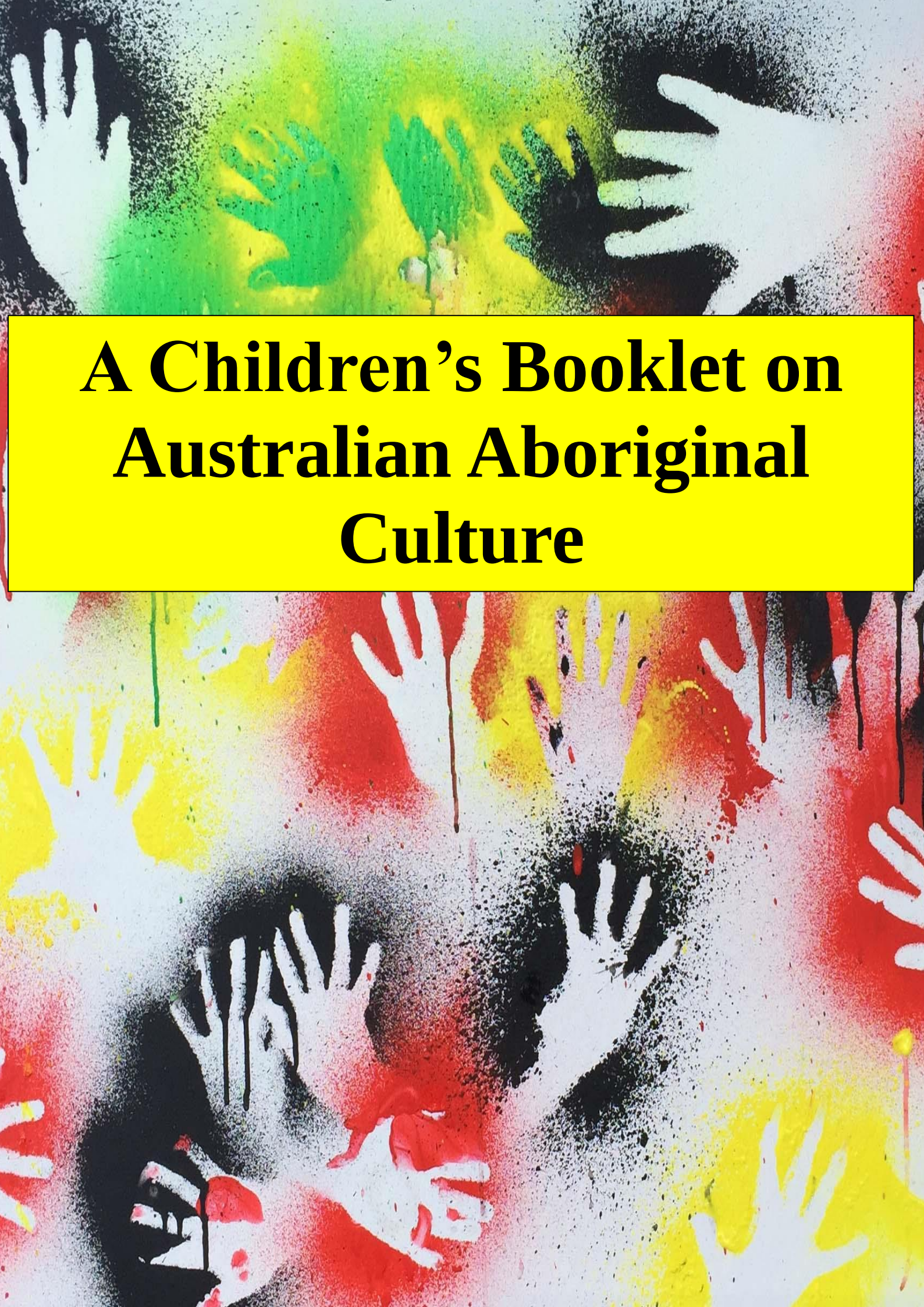

A Children's Booklet on Australian Aboriginal Culture

Story Blocks

Story Blocks

The story blocks show traditional Australian Aboriginal art symbols that have been used for thousands of years as a means of communicating both within the tribe and to other tribes across Australia. Certain symbols taken by a tribe are referred to as iconography. A tribe then has a set of visual signs that has meaning to themselves, which they then use to record and retain information. These symbols are used in Australian Aboriginal art to describe landscapes, to tell and share stories along with many other reasons. Many of the symbols were developed through the drawing on dirt or sand, where old stories and customs were marked out as a means of teaching children. The symbols are also used to describe the hunting and tracking of animals. Animals leave tracks behind on the ground where they walk, so the Aboriginal people follow these tracks to hunt for food. The Aboriginal hunters would then draw something like a map which would outline animal tracks and where and when to capture them.
The story blocks also have the English word on them as to help a child to observe and understand what the English word looks like. The educator then can assist the child in pronouncing the word and what it means.

Activities:

- Have a child create a story by laying out the blocks out on the floor like a road. The blocks each have a boy or girl symbol, so the child may start with that block, then put the circle block next to it to symbolise a boy or girl's home. Then just create a story for example;

One day a girl left her home and saw a rainbow. The girl then saw and felt the rain. As she walked along the track she then saw an emu. As she kept walking along the track she saw a kangaroo jumping near a river. The little girl said hello to the kangaroo then realised it was getting late, so she walked back along the track and went home.

- Invite 10 children to each grab a block and stand in front of the class while a child tells a story. The child telling the story tells the other children where to stand in relation to how the story will be told. The boy or girl story block is a good place to start, and then the other children stand in a line with a story block, so that the story teller can then tell their story.

- Build little houses with placing a boy, girl or animal block on top like a roof to symbolise whose home it is.

Wooden Animal Stencils

Wooden Animal Stencils

Australia's natural fauna has some of the most beautiful and unique animals anywhere on the planet. Just think how lucky we are to see lyre birds, kangaroos, koalas, or to hear the sound of a kookaburra. Australian Aboriginal people have always had enormous amounts of knowledge and skills on how to live of the land. Australian Aboriginal people were known as hunters and gatherers. They lived with the land, nurturing and caring for it. As a means of survival in one of the harshest climates in the world, the Aboriginal people had the ability to track down animals, to identify and locate edible plants and to find sources of fresh water and fish. Some examples of the nurturing and preserving of our animals were; not to hunt female animals or when gathering bird eggs only taking some and not all of them so as to allow some to hatch. Aboriginal people did not hunt for fun and they only hunted and gathered when they needed too. These animal stencils hopefully allow the children to think how different, beautiful and special our Australian animals are and how we have to treat them as our friends and care for them. The children also may think where each animal lives and what they eat.

Activities:

- Trace around the animal stencils with a pencil or texture then colour in their drawing.
- Encourage the child to think about where the animal lives, (the bush) and they can draw and colour in their habitat.
- The children can pick their favourite animal and hold it in their hand and tell a story about each animal, then show how the animal moves.
- Using the story blocks and the animal stencils together, the children can match which animal track belongs to each animal and tell a story.

Wooden Clap Sticks

Wooden Clap Sticks

Australian Aboriginal Clap Sticks are a traditional instrument that Australian Aboriginal people use during ceremonies. These ceremonies are called ‘Corroborees’. Corroborees are a time to sing songs, dance and to celebrate. The clap sticks consist of two sticks crafted from various woods which are usually decorated with symbols, colours and designs symbolising a clan or tribe. The clap sticks are played by striking one against the other to provide particular rhythms. Clap sticks can be heard in accompany with a Yadiki, (didgeridoo) in corroborees being played by the Yadiki musicians. The clap sticks can be played by men, women and children. Clap sticks can also be used as a digging stick when searching for food and water.

Activities:

- Create this activity as an Aboriginal Corroboree. Sit children in a circle and one at a time allow the children to say hello, then saying their name, around the circle clapping the sticks together. Find out the local Aboriginal language for saying hello and encourage the children to say that word. You may want to add to saying hello with what they might do today while at school.

- Once they have done this they could sing songs which don't need to be Aboriginal. You may want to read a Dreamtime story which is provided in the kit. The whole activity is to feel it’s a special ceremony where they have fun, be friends with each other while acting like they are all aboriginal.

- You may want to pretend to build a safe fire and its night time, or they are celebrating a child's birthday or Naidoc Week or Reconciliation Week.

- Clap sticks could also be used to learn how to count. The child could hit it once and be told that's number one, or hit the clap sticks together 5 times, etc..

Boomerangs

Boomerangs

There are basically three types of boomerangs that are made and used by Australian Aboriginal people and they are;

- hunting boomerangs
- returning boomerangs
- Star shaped returning boomerangs.

All tribes made and used the hunting boomerangs, but some clans or tribes did not use the returning boomerang or the star shaped boomerang.

The hunting boomerang is not made to return to the person throwing the boomerang. It is made from a very hard wood that would be strong enough for hunting.

The returning boomerang was not made for hunting as it is usually light and not very strong. The returning Boomerang was more like a toy for young aboriginal boys. The Boomerang would allow a child to practice with it and develop good throwing skills, which would then help when they are older with hunting. The returning Boomerang would also be used for sport by the young boys and men. The boys and men would compete as to who could throw the furthest and the most accurately while catching the returning Boomerang.
The star shaped Boomerang is shaped like a cross. It was made with two flat wooden pieces tied together. This type was only made and used by the people in the rainforest areas of Northern Queensland. This Boomerang had very sharp edges and would be thrown at small rainforest birds because it was small enough to get around the trees.

All these Boomerangs would have special grooves cut in them as to be used for the making of fire. Boomerangs can also be used a digging tool and for clapping together to make an instrument during Corroborees.

Activities:

- The children can trace around the Boomerang on a piece of cardboard which could be strong enough to throw outside. Encourage the children to colour and design their own Boomerangs with Australian Aboriginal symbols or their favourite colours or their favourite things.
- When pretending to build a fire for a ceremony, encourage a child to use another stick and rub on the Boomerang while pretending to light the fire.
- Use as an instrument, clapping together in the Corroborees
- The kit provides a Boomerang which has no designs or colours. This is so that your centre can design your own Boomerang. Talk to the local Aboriginal community or to a local Aboriginal artist or look for some of the symbols, designs and colours that are used there. You may wish to use the local Aboriginal tribal ‘Totem’ as part of the design or just allow the children to design it with their own ideas.

Aboriginal Message Sticks
(‘talking sticks’)

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The Aboriginal Message Sticks have also been known to be called, ‘talking sticks’. The main purpose of the sticks was for communication. Aboriginal people had no written words or language. The written words and language was detailed with the use of symbols, designs, and markings. The designs on each message stick were to assist the carrier with translating the message once it had reached its destination. The message stick has been known to have journeyed hundreds of miles to convey messages like, marriages, deaths, initiations and other special events or messages. The message sticks can vary in size and can be created with designs made from sharp stones which would be carved into the wood. The sticks can also be designed with the use of colour, which would be painted with natural ochre. Message sticks are used throughout Corroborees with assembling tribes together to celebrate an important event.

Activities:

- Design your message stick to have meanings, symbols or colours from your school or area. The message stick may hold important information or a message from your school. Some messages might be; that all the children are friends and they will help and be good to each other, the message stick might be used for gathering all the children together.

- The message sticks can be used to start the Corroboree with a child relaying a message to the other children that it’s time to meet for a special celebration.

- The children can trace around the wooden message stick and create their own message stick on paper or cardboard which they might take home with a special message like; they love mum, dad, grandparents or family members.

- Your school may create a message stick with the intention of a reward or like a student of the week and the child takes home the stick and then returns the message stick at the end of the week.

Ochre

Ochre

Ochre is a type of hard clay. It is found in a range of colours from white, yellow, red and brown. To use the ochre first it was crushed to a powder and then mixed with water, saliva or animal fat to create paint. The Australian Aboriginal people would mix other pigments like fire ash, sand and blood to create different colours. The ochre then would be is used for body decoration or for painting on rocks, in caves and onto wood. Body painting consists of smearing clay of natural ochres from the earth onto the skin, which may display traditional designs belonging to ones tribe. Throughout Arnhem Land, communities decorate the bodies of young boys before they are initiated. The boys chests and upper arms and thighs, are painted in patterns and designs from the tribe and of animal totemic subjects. Totems can be animals, or other living beings that have a spiritual meaning and connection to an individual, family or tribe. The totem is chosen as a protector and guider for people while they journey through life.
For Aboriginal people from all over Australia, spirituality centres on the land and their connection to the land. When ceremonies are conducted various ochres are used. A ceremony might have a story or song about particular animals so; different coloured ochre and designs will be used according to that ceremony to awaken the spirituality. In traditional times, ochre was very important in burials. The body and bones of people would be painted with ochre to allow the person to rest peacefully while still being connected to their land, family and spirituality. Ochre was also used as medicines and for healing. An example of healing is that the ochre was rolled in eucalyptus leaves and then used to treat headaches and chest colds.

Activities:

- Mix the ochre with some water to create a liquid type paste. Then apply the white ochre to the children before a ceremony or an important event. Boys usually will have lines and strokes on their face while girls have dots on their face. For arms and legs just smear over the skin using your hands.
- Place a small amount of ochre in a eucalyptus leaf and allow the child to pretend to heal a sick doll or animal toy.
- Mix the ochre with acrylic paints and allow the children to paint on rocks, wood or canvas.

Please note that only adults should mix the powdered ochre. Avoid eye, nose and mouth contact. Place the ochre in a container and mix with small amounts of water until it resembles a paste.

This Booklet is designed to allow Educators and children to observe, explore, learn and understand Australian Aboriginal culture and its people.

The booklet also allows a child to,

- Learn Australia's Aboriginal culture in a different way by using different objects
- observe, learn, pronounce and understand English words
- be creative
- use their imagination
  Work together with other children
  Play and have fun while learning
  Build confidence within themselves to share and tell stories
- learn about Australia's natural animals, their characteristics and their habitats
- for Australian Aboriginal children this booklet will allow them to connect to their Aboriginality and to their culture

The booklet is also designed for all Educators to use as a guide in educating children about the Australian Aboriginal culture. The kit and booklet can be used safely knowing that is designed to be culturally appropriate and respectful according to Australian Aboriginal Culture.

This booklet was designed and written by Graham Toomey, Australian Aboriginal Artist from the Wiradjuri and Wongaibon tribes of Western NSW.

All the wooden educational resources for the kits were made by the St Vincent de Paul St Joseph's Workshop at Gosford, with the assistance of Graham Toomey, who provided the Aboriginal art and cultural knowledge.

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Learning

Creating

Exploring

Sharing

Culture

Friends

Playing

Happiness