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Lesson 1

The First Australians

Supplies Needed for This Lesson:

A standard, 30cm wooden ruler	Hammer and nails (or a skewer)
String	Cardboard (optional – for boomerang)
Scissors	One copy of the student sheets for each student
Crayons or coloured pencils	Encyclopedias and / or access to the internet

Many years ago, a tribe of natives made their way along a river, looking for a good place to set up camp. These were the Australian aborigines. A simple people, who hunted and gathered food, lived in simple shelters, had respect for their leaders and enjoyed their own unique style of art and music. They also had their own ways of meeting together and discussing matters of importance to the tribe.

The Australian aborigine lived a straightforward life, searching, scavenging and hunting for food. They ate wild fruits and vegetables, as well as kangaroos, emus and even snakes. Exceptionally skilled hunters, these natives invented some precision weapons, of which the most well known would be the boomerang. This was a curved stick, that when thrown correctly, would return to its waiting sender. That is, unless it struck an animal. Then, the poor creature would drop dead as surely as if it had been hit by a modern-day bullet. The skilled hunters would then return to their dwellings, and enjoy their humble meal.

A tribe's camp consisted of simple shelters, known as 'wurlies', 'gunyahs', or 'mia-mias'. These were constructed using two support sticks and one larger sapling. Covering these with bark, twigs and branches gave the families a dry place to sleep. Always camping near the water, the tribe would move on once the food reserves became low.

Because it was much easier than starting a fire with two dry sticks, they would take with them a live 'fire-stick' to light the fire at their next stop. New dwellings were then built, and the group settled into their freshly built home.



Amongst the tribe were leaders, who were known as the elders and the medicine man. The elders were older men, who would make decisions and often counsel the tribe in times of crisis. Then there was the medicine man. Primarily he was consulted by the sick, however, the most powerful duty he had was to 'point the bone'. A bone, usually the leg of a kangaroo, would be pointed at a tribal member who had done some wrong. This was a horrifying experience, for whoever the bone was pointed at believed he was cursed, and he would give up all hope of life, pine away and eventually, die. Such was the power of the elders and the medicine man.

The aborigines were skilled artists. Cleverly they would use coloured clay on rocks, weapons and even themselves. Often, their paintings would give the appearance of x-rays, as in the picture on the next page. By far their most recognized work, however, were the paintings they would do on their own bodies. These clever natives would spend hours creating a magnificent work of art, preparing for the special gathering known as a corroboree.



This was a special time of music, dance and story-telling. After covering their bodies, the tribe would meet around the camp-fire for an evening full of noise and entertainment. Music was provided by use of special instruments, with one such instrument being the didgeridoo. This was a hollow pipe, about 4 feet long. When the player would press his lips to it and blow, a loud, droning sound could be heard. Also, they would tap boomerangs or sticks together, and of course, sing. Thus the tribe would enjoy a marvellous evening with their musicians and storytellers.

Meeting together for a sacred ceremony, however, was a very different affair. Only the men were permitted to attend these, and they were a very solemn gathering. The ceremonies would be announced by use of a 'bull-roarer', which was a thin piece of wood about an inch and a half wide by ten to twelve inches long. When swung around in the air, this produced a tremendous roaring sound, that could be heard many miles away, thus calling the men together. Once gathered, the men would commence the ceremony.

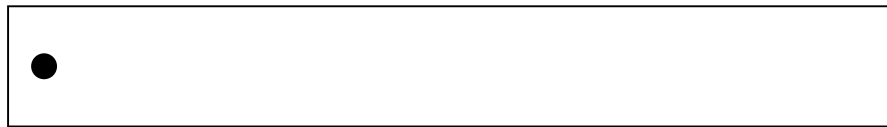


Living an uncomplicated life, the aborigines hunted, camped, and shared with each other. They told stories, sang, and solved problems by use of the tribe's elders and medicine men. Most importantly, the first Australians left their mark via their beautiful artwork, weapons and instruments, so that we may continue to learn about their history and their culture.

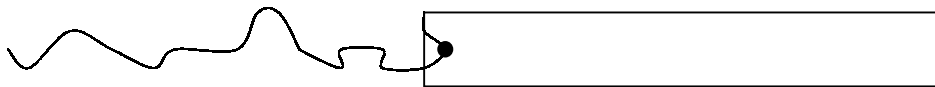


Things to Do:

1. Questions to Answer.
 - a) What are the following:
boomerang; bull-roarer; didgeridoo; wurley.
 - b) What food did the aboriginals eat?
 - c) What weapons did they use?
 - d) What does 'pointing the bone' mean?
2. Find out if there are any places in your district with aboriginal names, and try to find out their meanings.
3. Aborigines would often go 'walkabout'. See if you can find out what this means, using encyclopedias or the internet as your research tools.
4. Make a Bull-roarer!
Take a standard, 30cm wooden ruler.
Using a nail, skewer, or other sharp instrument, punch a hole in one end, as thus:

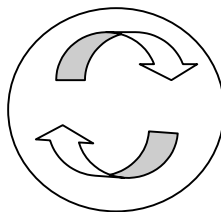


Then, thread a length of string through the hole – the exact length doesn't matter – but around 60cm is good.



Tie the string to the ruler, and make a loop in the other end, so you can hold onto it.

Now, make sure you're either outside or have plenty of room around you – including 'upwards' (no broken light-shades, please!) And, standing with the bull-roarer at your side, spin it round and round, upwards and downwards, as fast as you can. You should begin to hear a 'roaring' sound.



Congratulations - You have made your own bull-roarer!