

Water Wisdom

The Well

Tap into water education




Water is central to Aboriginal culture and identity, and traditional knowledge of water ways has been shared for many thousands of years. This workbook invites students to explore water in culture and storytelling, water in our environment, and the wisdom to manage our water resources.



Niina Marni

We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of South Australia. We pay respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging. We recognise the traditional custodians' unique connection to their lands and waters, language, lore, kinship and ceremony. Through this acknowledgement we commit to ongoing learning and understanding on our journey to reconciliation. We also pay respect to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from other areas of Australia.

In this workbook you will learn about how water has been sustainably managed and protected on this land for many thousands of years. The biodiversity surrounding waterways support life, food, and innovation. Water places are sites for discovery, storytelling, ceremony and tradition. Water is a life-source and essential to not just our bodies, but to our culture and our history. We hope this learning experience will help you connect to the water on this land and in your community.



Connection to land and water

Introduction by Nellie Hirschhausen, Mirning, Kokotha, Kurna, and Narungga woman, and Aboriginal Engagement Lead at SA Water.

For the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this country, a connection to land and water is everything, and extends beyond ownership. When speaking of a connection to country, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mean they belong to it and are a part of it. As humans require air to breathe, that is the essence of having a connection to country, which has occurred for generations longer than can be imagined.

The connection to country guides all other aspects of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Language, Lore and Country are the core elements that bind each to the other. Family relationships, which is known as kinship are dictated by who our grandparents are, when and where we are born. We are given our name according to certain traits shown as we grow and are taught from a very young age the importance of caring and respecting the country, it is our mother earth.

Some communities describe our origins of being and laws as Dreamtime Stories, Creation stories or Tjurkurrpa. It is the past, it is now, and it is the future. It is everything at one time. Our songlines keep the country thriving, we have ceremony and rituals to maintain our laws and culture, stories through dance to remind us why we need to listen carefully and not break the laws, we all have a place and responsibility.

Water stories

The [story of Tjilbruke](#) (Jill-brook-ee) tells the origins of freshwater springs along the coast, and the birds that live in the area. It also passes on useful information like where to find fresh drinking water and teaches lessons about rules and consequences.

Stories about water are told by Aboriginal communities across the country, and by different cultures across the globe. Here is a chance to reflect on the water stories you have heard and told, and what lessons these stories hold.

What other creation stories have you heard about water? What creation do these stories explain?

What other stories have you heard about water from around the world? (Loch Ness monster, Kraken)



Have a think about stories your family and friends tell about water. It might be a funny story from a holiday by a river, or a serious story teaching a lesson about being safe around water.

What's your water story?



Draw a picture or attach a photo of your water story



Water story activity

Look at a map to find the beaches, creeks, rivers, lakes or wetlands near you, and choose one to focus on.

What does it look like from above the map? Write a short description using **personification** to bring it to life. **Reminder:** Personification is a form of figurative language that attributes human characteristics, appearance, emotion or behaviour to animals, inanimate objects, or ideas.

Your task is to write an origin story to explain how this water source came to be. You might like to draw pictures to add detail.

Water wisdom

Watch the Water Wisdom video series hosted by Kaurna man Jack Buckskin and answer the questions below to learn about water in different Aboriginal communities across South Australia.

People in these videos talk about the history of places, and many of the beliefs and cultural practices described in the videos continue today.

Adnyamathanha

What region is the home of the Adnyamathanha people? What is the environment like?

Duncan talks about how the waterhole use to be full of water, but now its very dry. Why do you think the water flow has changed over the years?

How does drought impact food for local people and animals?

What animals did you see living on Adnyamathanha land in the video?

What does the word Adnyamathanha mean?

Why do you think places with water are often special places for families and communities to gather?

Ngarrindjeri

What region is the home of the Ngarrindjeri people? What is the environment like?

What is the Ngarrindjeri word for 'river'?



What does the term yarluwar-ruwe (sea country) tell us about the attitude towards the landscape?

What innovation did Ngarrindjeri use to attract fish to their yuki?

Ngarrindjeri people were renowned for their lakun weaving. What kind of objects did they make?

How did young Ngarrindjeri people learn about how to live sustainably on the land?

Boandik

What region is the home of the Boandik people? What is the environment like?

What is the traditional name for the blue lake?

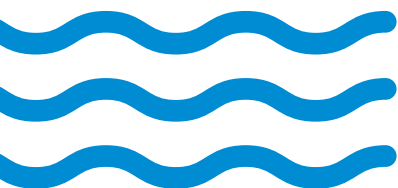


What is the fresh water on the beach filtered through under the ground?

How did the Boandik people purify drinking water?

What was bull kelp used for?

What unique fishing method did the Boandik people use?



Kaurna

What region is the home of the Kaurna people? What is the environment like?

What is the Kaurna name for the River Torrens? Write the translation below.

What does the term yarluwar-ruwe (sea country) tell us about the attitude towards the landscape?

What innovation did Ngarrindjeri use to attract fish to their yuki?

What other creation stories have you heard about water? What creation do these stories explain?



Barngarla

What region is the home of the Barngarla people? What is the environment like?



What is the definition of Barngarla?



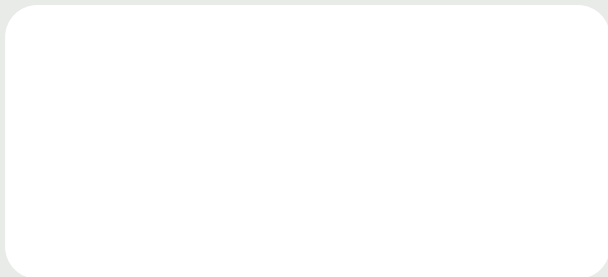
What kind of tide is required to access the fresh water flowing through the rocks?



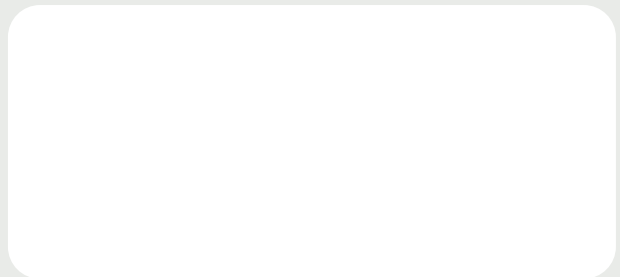
How did families communicate the location of water sources to other families?



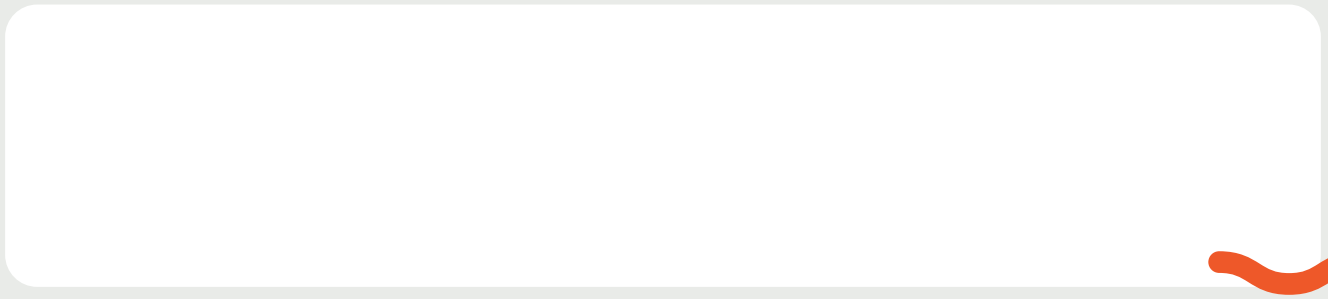
What signs did Barngarla people look for to find fresh water?



Barngarla people that had found fresh water were then responsible for maintaining it. Why? How do you think they did this?



What are the three Barngarla words for water? Why do you think there are different words?



Water as a resource

We rely on water to support life for all humans, animals and plants. The natural water cycle means it is a renewable resource, raining fresh water onto our land, rivers and oceans, then being naturally filtered through evaporation into the clouds to start the cycle again.

However, it is important to take care of our water sources and use water sustainably, because finding fresh, clean water can be tricky, especially during drought. Our changing climate means droughts and severe weather events like floods have become more frequent and more extreme. Managing our water resources carefully is more important than ever.

Well,
water'ya
know?

All the water molecules on Earth today have always been here! That means the water you drink today might be the same water drunk by megafauna, millions of years ago!

What is the one thing you learned about sustainability from the Water Wisdom videos?

What can happen when we don't take care of our water sources and systems?

When waterways are healthy, we see improved biodiversity in those areas. What is biodiversity and why is it important?

What biodiversity can be found in and around your local water sources? You might like to visit the site to investigate for this one. You can draw pictures below too.

List 3 things you can do to help protect your local water sources/systems.

1.

2.

3.

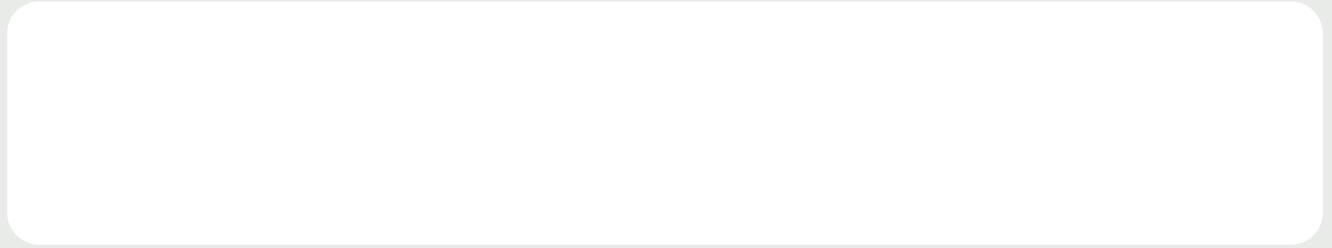
Water where you live

Connect with a local Aboriginal Elder or community members to learn about language, traditional methods of finding and using water, and any creation stories for water systems in your area.

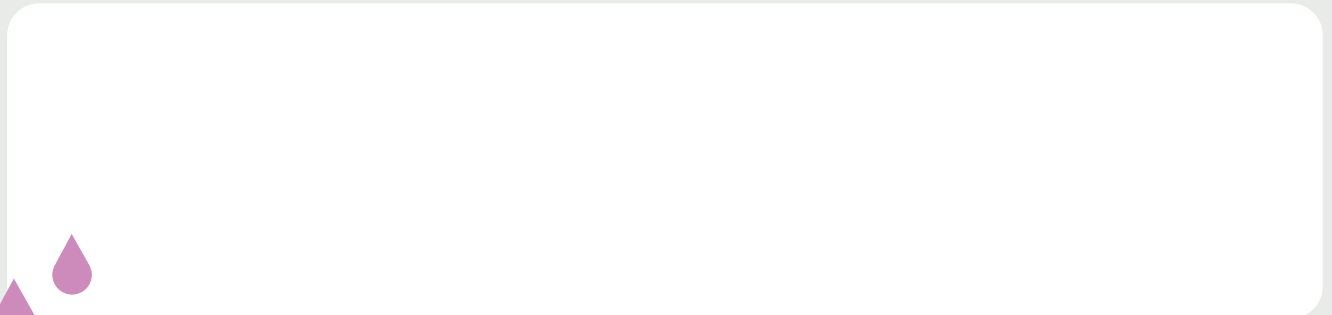
I live on the land of the _____ people.

The _____ word for water is _____ .

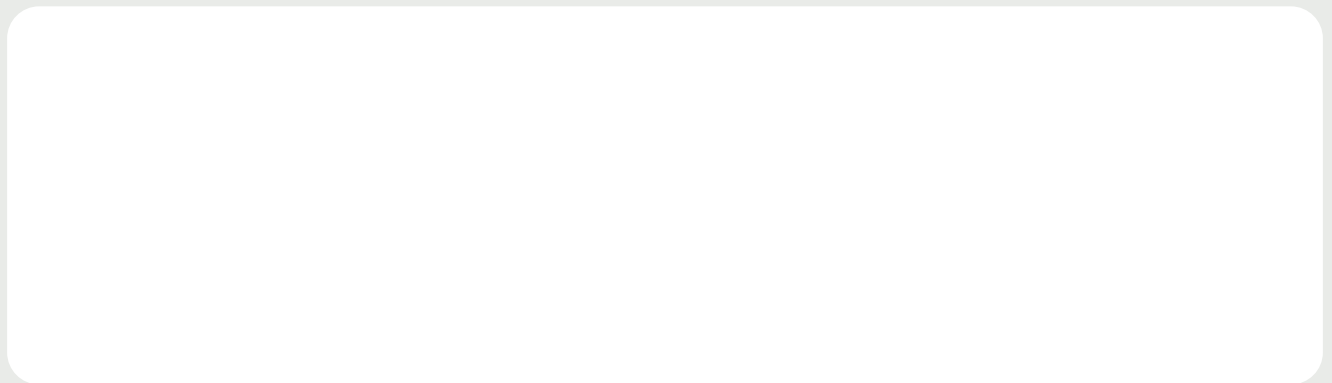
Other words I have learned:



How are waterways drawn in traditional Aboriginal artwork? (Rivers, waterholes, beach etc). Draw the symbols below.




How do/did local Aboriginal people care for water system and use water carefully?





What is one important tradition or piece of knowledge about water from your local area?

Write or draw a creation story from your area.

Share your water wisdom

You can influence your community to value and protect water systems and appreciate cultural knowledge by sharing your water wisdom.

For this project, choose one thing you have learned about water in your local area. This might be a tradition, cultural practice or story – you may like to choose something you noted in the “Water where you live” section! Think about what lessons you can teach about sustainability as part of your project too.

Work in small groups to share your water wisdom in a creative and memorable way!

You might like to choose one of the ideas below, or come up with something on your own:

- Design a poster that you can display at school and in your community (approach your local library and shops to display).
- Present your water wisdom with a talk to younger years at school, or in an assembly.
- Make a video that tells a story. It could be a news segment, a short film, or even an animation.
- Get creative: draw, paint, dance or sing your message.
- Use traditional practices to craft something, like a woven basket .
- Annotate a map to connect stories with physical features.
- Host a walking tour for your local community.

Teachers note

As an alternative, you might like to research water wisdom in different parts of the world, and share language, stories, traditions from a diverse range of places. Encourage the exploration of traditional knowledge from First Nations peoples wherever possible.

For the teachers

Thank you for teaching your students about the traditional knowledge and connection to water and our environment.

Share your projects with us!

We would love to see your projects and hear about the Water Wisdom your students have gained and shared. Please share your responses via social media or email our education team:

thewell@sawater.com.au

Curriculum links

This Water Wisdom resource aligns with the cross-curricular priorities of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and sustainability.

General capabilities developed during this unit include critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, intercultural understanding, literacy and numeracy.

Other learning areas that connect to this workbook are outlined below.

Year 4

The diversity of First Nations Australians, their social organisation and their continuous connection to Country/Place ([AC9HS4K01](#)).

The importance of environments, including natural vegetation and water sources, to people and animals in Australia and on another continent ([AC9HS4K05](#)).

Pose questions to explore observed patterns and relationships and make predictions based on observations ([AC9S4I01](#)).

Identify sources of water and describe key processes in the water cycle, including movement of water through the sky, landscape and ocean; precipitation; evaporation; and condensation ([AC9S4U02](#)).

Write and create texts to communicate findings and ideas for identified purposes and audiences, using scientific vocabulary and digital tools as appropriate ([AC9S4I06](#)).

Describe the ways of producing food and fibre ([AC9TDE4K03](#)).

Year 7

Classification of environmental resources and the way that water connects and changes places as it moves through environments ([AC9HG7K01](#)).

The location and distribution of water resources in Australia, their implications, and strategies to manage the sustainability of water ([AC9HG7K02](#)).

Factors that influence the decisions people make about where to live, including perceptions of the liveability of places and the influence of environmental quality ([AC9HG7K05](#)).

Identify a strategy for action in relation to environmental, economic, social or other factors, and explain potential impacts ([AC9HG7S05](#)).

How First Nations Australians have responded to environmental processes and changes over time ([AC9HH7K04](#)).

The technological achievements of early First Nations Australians, and how these developed in different places and contributed to daily life, and land and water source management ([AC9HH7K05](#)).

Analyse how food and fibre are produced in managed environments and how these can become sustainable ([AC9TDE8K04](#)).