



# YOUNG DARK EMU

A TRUER HISTORY BRUCE PASCOE

# TEACHERS' GUIDE

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Magabala  
Books



# INTRODUCTION

These learning activities are designed to help teachers work with *Young Dark Emu*. They are aligned with the HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES CURRICULUM AT YEARS 4 AND 5, where the text's content has strong relevance.

*Young Dark Emu*, like the original *Dark Emu*, provides students with the opportunity to explore a different perspective regarding Australia's First Nations and colonial histories. Too often, Indigenous perspectives about the past have been dismissed, along with the oral traditions on which they rely. With this book, Bruce Pascoe confronts the silencing of Indigenous voices and histories. Using the written documents of early European explorers and colonists as his evidence, Pascoe provides irrefutable proof of complex First Nations societies which existed prior to colonisation.

## LEARNING APPROACH

Some of the themes explored in *Young Dark Emu* are confronting and contested. These learning activities encourage an inquiry approach. They aim to help students engage with the text, including numerous historical sources, before drawing their own conclusions regarding Indigenous and colonial histories. To encourage critical thinking and reflection, a number of visible-thinking routines and perspective-taking activities are included.

*Young Dark Emu* contains language and concepts that may be challenging for students at the Year 4 and 5 levels. Consequently, the learning activities are organised by chapter to enable teachers to explore the entire text or only those sections they consider appropriate for their students. Similarly, teachers are encouraged to select and adapt the activities to best meet the learning abilities and needs of their students.



ILLUSTRATION: *Scenes from Aboriginal Life* by Kwat Kwat artist, Tommy McRae, 1862. State Library of Victoria Pictures Collection

# CURRICULUM

These learning activities are aligned to the Australian Curriculum Humanities and Social Sciences, particularly History and Geography. The learning activities also support the development of HASS skills, and are organised around the HASS inquiry process.

## YEAR 4

- The diversity of Australia's First Nations and the long and continuous connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to Country/ Place (land, sea, waterways and skies) ([ACHASSK083 - Scootle](#))
- The nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example, people and environments ([ACHASSK086 - Scootle](#))
- The custodial responsibility Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have for Country/ Place, and how this influences views about sustainability ([ACHASSK089 - Scootle](#))

## YEAR 5

- The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of the inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed ([ACHASSK107 - Scootle](#))
- The influence of people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, on the environmental characteristics of Australian places ([ACHASSK112 - Scootle](#))
- The impact of bushfires or floods on environments and communities, and how people can respond ([ACHASSK114 - Scootle](#))

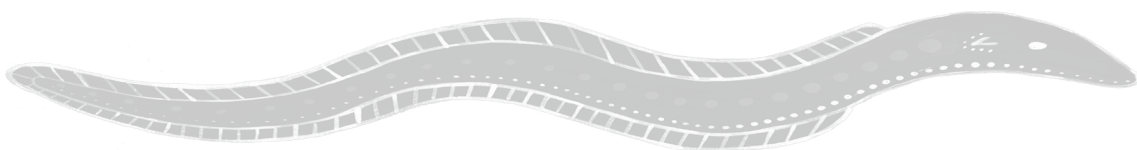


ILLUSTRATION: Bara by Leanne Mulgo Watson

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## INDIGENOUS AND SENSITIVE CONTENT

*Young Dark Emu* contains many historical primary sources, some of which contain language and descriptions regarding First Nations People that are considered inappropriate today. Teachers are advised to acknowledge such examples as they arise by clarifying meaning and discussing the original author's motivations for using such terms. Questioning can be useful: Why do you think he used that word/description? What word would we use today?

Some of the ideas and themes explored in *Young Dark Emu*, such as frontier conflict, may be distressing or challenging for some students. Students may not wish to be active participants in class discussions and this should be respected.

Providing opportunities for individual reflection can be useful, and many of the suggested learning activities encourage critical, reflective and empathetic thinking.

While students should be encouraged to express their thoughts and opinions, it is important to challenge stereotypical or discriminatory statements made by students. The best way to do this is to ask them to explain the basis for their statements, so any assumptions or misinformation can be quickly corrected (e.g. What makes you say that? What are your reasons for saying that? How do you think others might feel about that?)

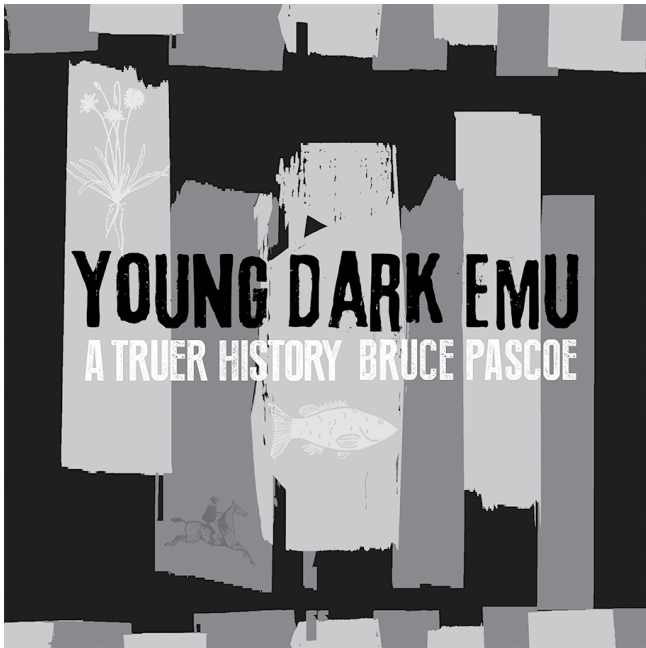
## QUESTIONING

- Prior to reading the text, ask your students to close their eyes and imagine life in Australia before it was colonised in 1788. Keeping their eyes closed, ask students the following stimulus questions:
  - Imagine a mealtime. What would Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples be eating? How might they have got this food?

- Imagine the types of places these First Nations peoples lived and slept. Was it comfortable? How many people lived there?
- Imagine how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples spent their days. What activities and tasks did they do?

As a class, share student responses, without judgment or commentary.

# RESEARCHING AND ANALYSING



## Introducing the text

- Display the front cover for students and pose the question: Why do you think this book might be called *Young Dark Emu: A Truer History*? Accept any ideas from students before reading the blurb on the back cover, the 'About the Author' section on the final page, and the picture and explanation of *Dark Emu* on page 7. Re-pose the question about the title and discuss.

Be sure to read the 'Note to Readers' on page 7, and warn students that they may find some content sad or confronting.

## The land grab

- Colonisation and frontier conflict are contested areas in Australian history and, consequently, so is the language around these issues. **Worksheet A** asks students to define some of the terms used in *Young Dark Emu*.

Students are then challenged to consider differing perspectives regarding the use of these terms. Introduce this activity by exploring the image on page 12 with your students. Point to the settlers and ask students what these men might be thinking and feeling, then do the same with the Aboriginal men.

- On page 14, reference is made to the Myall Creek massacre. Research this event further with students by exploring the letter written by William Hobbs informing authorities about the massacre. It is available online, and using this link will take you to the New South Wales State Archives digital gallery: <https://gallery.records.nsw.gov.au/index.php/galleries/50-years-at-state-records-nsw/2-10/>

- On page 14 Pascoe writes: *The war between Aboriginal people and settlers is rarely mentioned in Australian history books as the 'settlers' deliberately covered up the massacres and the terrible cruelties inflicted on the Aboriginal people.*

Ask students to reflect on this statement using the thinking routine Connect Extend Challenge:

- How does the statement connect to what you already know?
- How does the statement extend or push your thinking in new directions?
- What is still challenging, confusing, or puzzling about the statement?

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## Agriculture

- In this chapter Pascoe argues that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were not living as 'hunters and gatherers' but rather as members of an established agricultural society.

**Worksheet B** challenges students to find evidence of this from the primary source material presented. Before students complete the worksheet, discuss as a class the definition of agriculture provided on the sheet (and see page 70).

- Focus students on the image and description of women harvesting yam daisies on pages 22/23 before watching this short video from ABC Education. It highlights an organisation in Victoria which is teaching young Australians today how to harvest and prepare yam daisies using traditional First Nation practices. Use this link to see more: <http://education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/2872205/murnong-daisies>
- As a class, explore the map on page 26, which shows Aboriginal and contemporary grain growing belts. Analyse this map with reference to an Australian climate map and a population map (both freely available online). Theorise about why the grain growing areas vary so considerably (e.g. use of native species).
- Colonisation had immediate and profound effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agriculture and livelihoods. Ask students to create mind maps to explore some of the consequences of colonisation.

They should write 'Colonisation' in the middle of the page and draw connections to impacts (e.g. sheep introduced, fences, tree clearing) and the consequences of these.

## Aquaculture

- Explore the various images and descriptions of fish traps in *Young Dark Emu*. Challenge students to design their own fish trap for a waterway of their choice. They should draw a plan that includes details about materials and how it works.
- Focus students on the Brewarrina Fish Trap and consider the introductory paragraph on page 34: *The old people's stories say Baiame, the creator spirit, made the trap. It was designed in such a way that all families could receive enough fish but sufficient numbers could pass through the trap to breed further upstream. Everyone can have their share and the fish can also prosper.*

As a class, discuss what this tells us about the beliefs of the Aboriginal peoples that are specific to that region, regarding the interconnectedness of spirit, land, people and animals. Select a local waterway to research or visit and challenge students to develop an 'interconnected' plan to manage the area, which considers the needs of people, animals and the environment.

# Home

- Explore the images of houses on pages 45, 46, 49 and 51. Use visual literacy skills to compare the variations in construction style, materials and features. Brainstorm the possible reasons for variations in housing across Australia. Working in small groups, challenge students to design houses suitable for different areas across Australia using only locally available natural materials. Allocate a place/region (tropical, alpine, desert etc) for each group to research. They should investigate the climate and local materials before designing their house. Each group should present their design, including details of proposed construction methods and materials, and justify their design decisions to the class.
- This activity develops empathy by encouraging students to consider different perspectives regarding the same event. Before distributing/ displaying **Worksheet C** read to the class the entire text relating to Charles Sturt's expedition to central Australia in *Young Dark Emu* (last paragraph on page 47 to end of first paragraph on page 50). Students will then write about these same events from the perspective of one of the Aboriginal villagers.
- After exploring this chapter refocus students on the first paragraph: *Before the British claimed Australia as their territory, they declared it terra nullius – which means 'land belonging to no one'. Although they knew Aboriginal people lived here, the British argued Australia was not settled because there was no evidence of houses, towns, roads or farms. Britain used this reasoning to claim Australia.*

As a class discuss the following questions:

- Do you think that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people thought Australia was 'a land belonging to no one'? Why?
- Do you think the British thought it was a land belonging to no one? What reasons might the British have had for claiming this?
- Do you think Australia was a land belonging to no one? Why?

It may be helpful to facilitate this discussion with follow up questions, such as, 'What makes you say that?' or 'Can you give an example of that?'

## Food storage

- Explore the CSIRO interactive Indigenous season calendars, which offer insights into the seasonal foods available to different Indigenous groups. With students working in small groups, allocate calendars and ask each group to identify what, when and how foods might have been stored by the First Nations people they have been allocated. Use the following link:  
[www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Indigenous-calendars](http://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Indigenous-calendars)
- Challenge your students to create a small storage vessel, suitable for nuts or dried fruit, using only natural items found in the local area. Test the vessels in the elements to see if they keep the food dry and fresh.

# LEARNING ACTIVITIES

## Fire

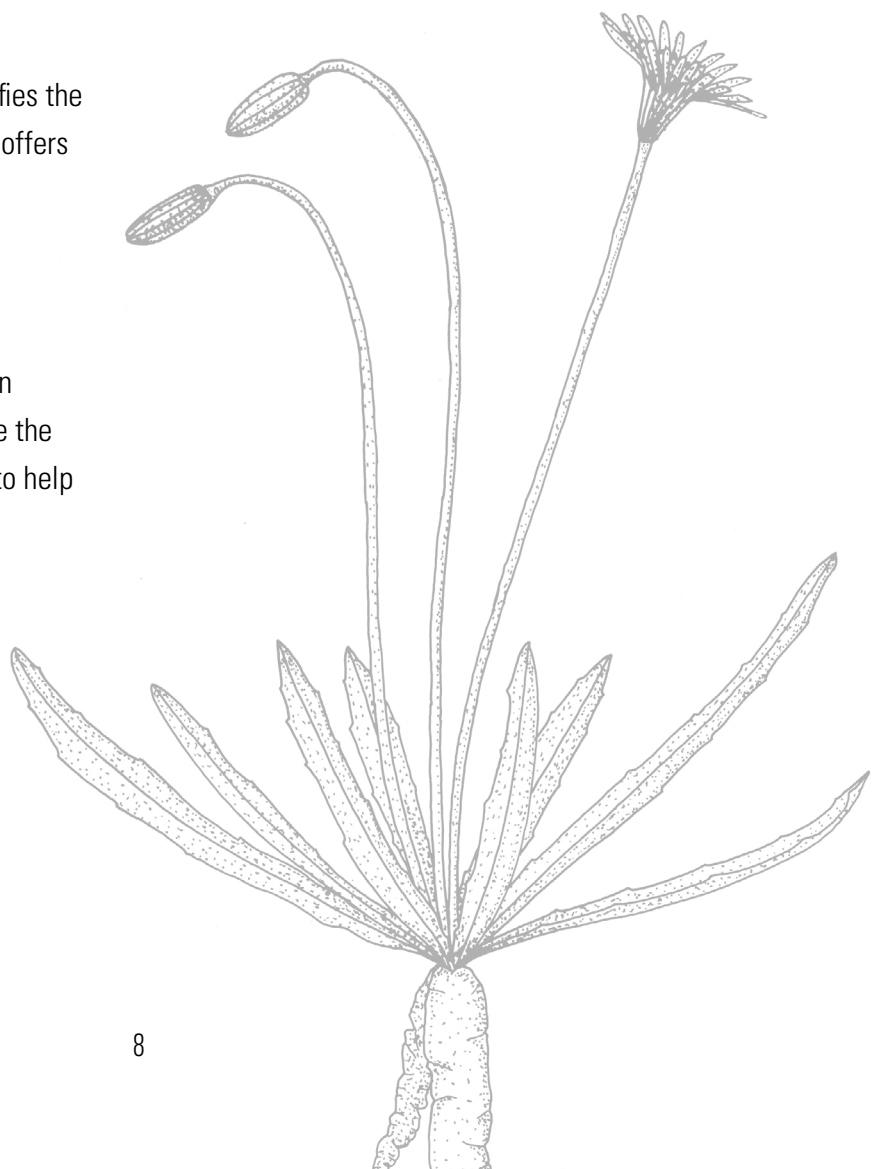
- **Worksheet D** encourages students to explore the different ways Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and colonisers used and viewed fire. Students brainstorm words describing fire (e.g. dangerous, useful, powerful, warm) and complete a Venn diagram to record the differing perspectives.
- While the early colonists prevented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples burning their land, many specialists today recognise how useful fire can be in managing the land and preventing catastrophic bushfires. Ask students to research the use of prescribed (or controlled) burning today, which remains a controversial issue. Students should write a report which identifies the arguments for and against the practice and offers their own opinion.

## Sacred places

- Share Mitchell's image and description of an Aboriginal burial ground on page 66/67. Use the See, Think, Wonder visual thinking routine to help students reflect on this special place.
  - What do you see?
  - What do you think about that?
  - What does it make you wonder?

## Sustainable futures

- Ask students to complete a PMI (Plus, Minus, Interesting) about changing Australian agricultural industries to produce mainly native plants and animals. Encourage students to think globally, nationally and personally.





# EVALUATING AND REFLECTING

- Remind students of the introductory activity where they closed their eyes and imagined how various First Nations people lived. Ask them to reflect on their learning by writing a response using these stems:

- I used to think ...
- But, now I think ...

Share and discuss learnings as a class.

- Use the Think Pair Share strategy to help students reflect on history and how it is told. Display the following questions for your students. They should reflect in silence before discussing their thoughts with a partner. Then share responses as a class.
- Why did Bruce Pascoe call this 'A Truer History'?
  - How is it different to other histories?
  - Do you think it is a truer history? Why?

# COMMUNICATING

- Working in groups of five, students should create a resource to share their knowledge about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived prior to colonisation with other audiences. Groups should decide on the approach and format they will use – visual display, book, exhibition, power point (or similar). Each group member should take responsibility for researching and presenting information regarding one of five themes:

- Agriculture
- Aquaculture
- Home
- Food Storage
- Fire

Remind students that their aim is to educate others, as many Australians are unaware of these aspects of Australian history.

- Remind students of the features of a persuasive text and ask them to use their learning to write a persuasive text on the theme: Was Australia 'a land belonging to no one' prior to British colonisation?



ILLUSTRATION: A reconstruction of a Gunditjmara village, western Victoria, by Paul Memmott

# WORKSHEET A: STRONG WORDS

Research and write your own definition for each of these words:

**Colonist** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Invader** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Land owner** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Murderer** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Native** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pioneer** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Resistance fighter** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Savage** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Settler** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Thief** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

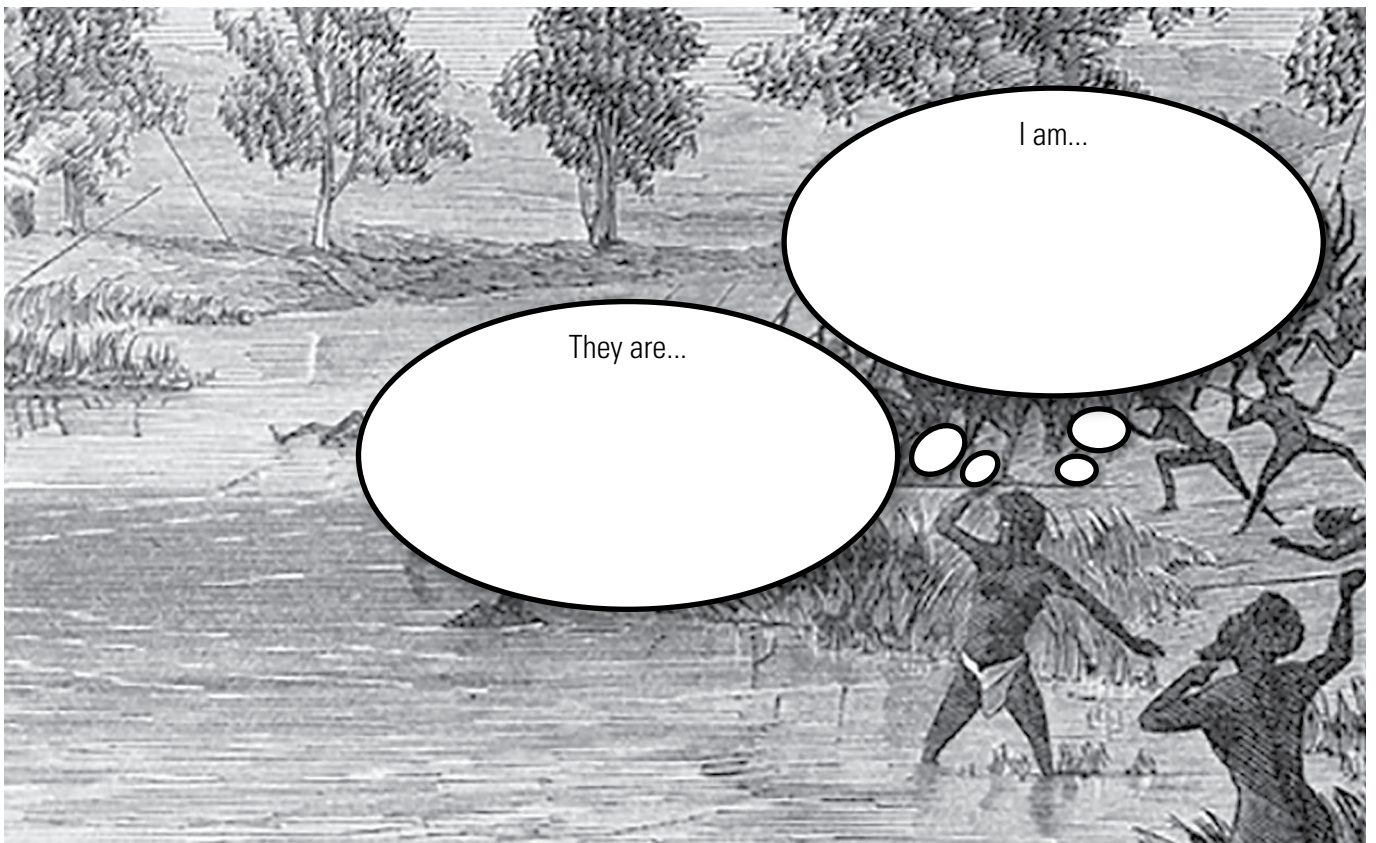
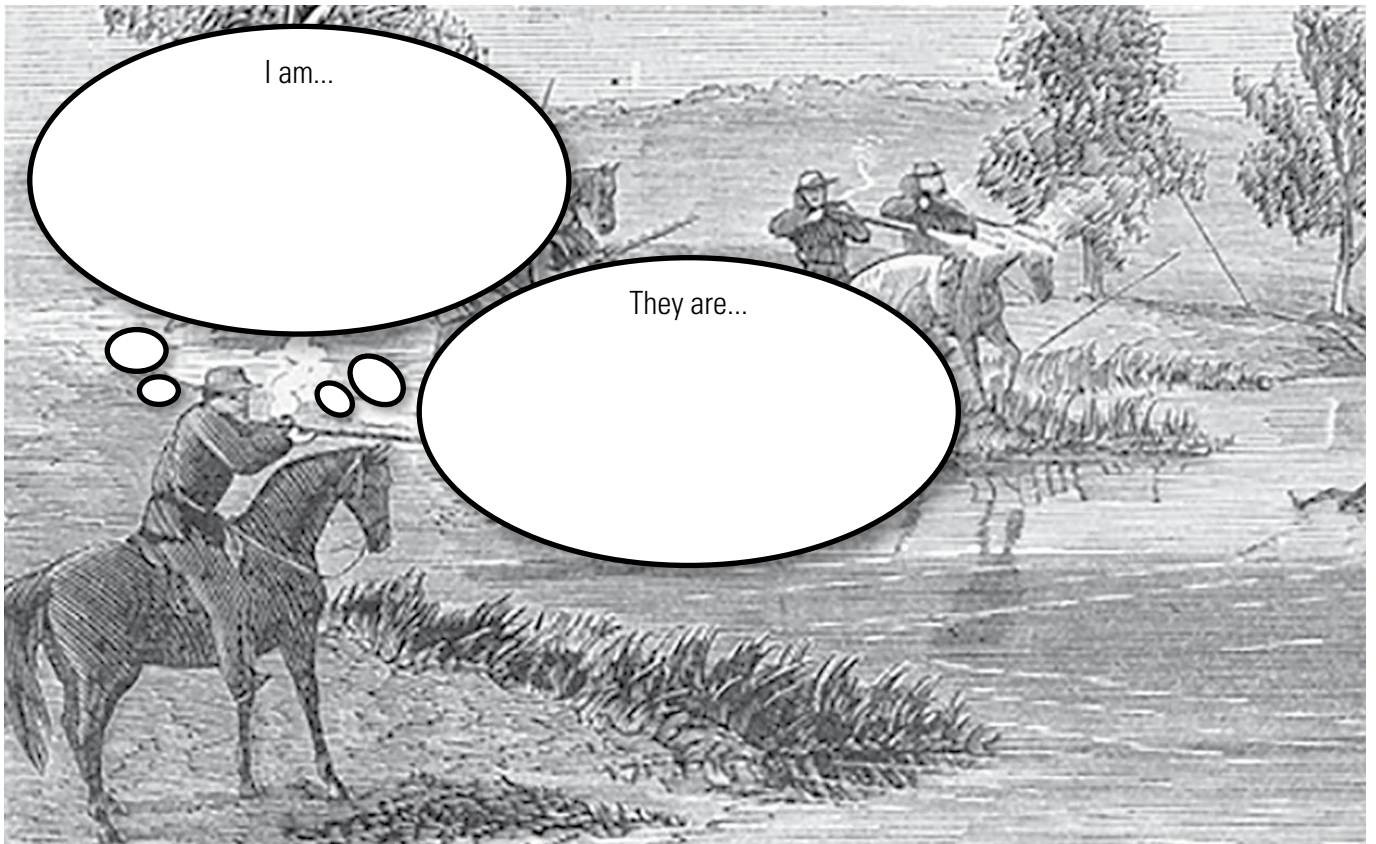
**Uncivilised** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Warrior** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Aboriginal people and colonisers did not see things in the same way. Use the words on the previous page to reflect on the different ways the two groups may have seen themselves and each other. Write words in the thought bubbles.



# WORKSHEET B: EVIDENCE OF AGRICULTURE

**According to European scholars, five signs indicated that a society was practising agriculture.**

There had to be evidence of people:

- selecting seeds for planting
- preparing the soil
- harvesting the crop
- storing the surplus produce
- living in permanent houses

Each of the sources on the following pages provides evidence of at least one of the five signs of agriculture. Examine each source. Decide which of the five signs it demonstrates and tick the box.

## Source:

Lieutenant Grey:

*...passed two native villages, or as the men called them towns – the huts of which they composed differed from those in the southern districts, in being built, and very nicely plastered over the outside with clay, and clods of turf...*

## This is evidence of Aboriginal people:

- selecting seeds for planting
- preparing the soil
- harvesting the crop
- storing the surplus produce
- living in permanent houses

Isaac Batey noticed:

*The soil (on a sloping ridge) is rich ... On the spot are numerous mounds with short spaces between each, and as all these are at right angles to the ridge's slope it is conclusive evidence that they were the work of human hands extending over a long series of years.*

- selecting seeds for planting
- preparing the soil
- harvesting the crop
- storing the surplus produce
- living in permanent houses

Andrew Todd sketched:



- selecting seeds for planting
- preparing the soil
- harvesting the crop
- storing the surplus produce
- living in permanent houses

**Source:**

Arthur Ashwin found a shelter which:

*... stored 17 large wooden dishes [each more than a metre long] filled with grass seed as large as rice.*

Walter Smith explained:

*They chuck a bit there ... Not much, you know, wouldn't be a handful ... one seed there, one seed there ... [of] course they chuck a little bit of dirt on, not too much though. And soon as first rain comes ... it will grow then.*

George Augustus Robinson recorded:

*... the native women were spread out over the plain as far as the eye could see, collecting [native yams] ... I inspected their bags and baskets on return and each had a load as much as she could carry.*

**This is evidence of Aboriginal people:**

- selecting seeds for planting
- preparing the soil
- harvesting the crop
- storing the surplus produce
- living in permanent houses

- selecting seeds for planting
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- living in permanent houses



# WORKSHEET D: FIRE

What does fire mean to you? Write down the first five words you associate with fire.

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Now think back to colonial Australia. European settlers saw the use of fire as a threat. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples saw it as an important land management tool.

Brainstorm words that each group may have used when thinking about fire and place them in the Venn diagram below. Put words that both groups might have used in the overlapping area.

**Settler:** To me fire is...

**First Nations:** To me fire is...

