

Intercultural Understanding Guide: Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Cultures

It is important to acknowledge that these are guidelines on best practice, but it is always important to respect the diverse perspectives of First Nations peoples that you are engaging with.

The First peoples of Australia are the Traditional Custodians of the land, having inhabited it for at least 65,000 years.

Acknowledging Country:

- It is important to always be aware of the land we are on, and pay respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land.
- A Welcome to Country can only be delivered by the Traditional Custodians of the land.
- An Acknowledgement of Country can be delivered by anyone, including First Nations and non-First Nations people.

Men's and Women's Business:

- Many Aboriginal tribes believe that men and women have different assigned roles in society, often called 'men's business' and 'women's business'. For example, it is generally believed that didgeridoo and boomerangs are exclusive to men while traditional instruments like clapsticks are exclusive to women.
- Roles and practices can vary across First Nations communities, hence it is important to be open-minded and always respect First Nations voices and their diverse beliefs and perspectives.

Respecting Elders:

- First Nations Elders are highly respected people in their community. They carry wisdom and cultural knowledge, as well as holding authority and power for decision-making.
- When speaking with and referring to Elders it's considered respectful to use the title 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'.
- It's important to deeply consider the context when communicating with Elders. Think about building trust and connection with the Elder before you ask anything of them.
- First Nations cultures are highly relational. You may build a trusting relationship by showing hospitality. For example, offering tea/coffee, providing refreshments or morning tea etc.

Concept of time:

- In First Nations culture, time is generally considered cyclical rather than linear or sequential.
- Time is divided into time periods and marked as daybreak, sunrise, morning etc.
- Time is measured by changes of season on the earth.
- Time is complex and it is a multidimensional concept. It connects the past, present and future. This connection has been commonly described as 'everywhen' by Aboriginal tribes.



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Respectful languages:

- The term 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' would be best practice to refer to Australian First Nations people because it is the most inclusive and representative of Australia's context.

Capitalisation should apply to the following terms to demonstrate respect:

- Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander'
- First Peoples/Nations/Australians;
- Traditional Owners/Custodians;
- Country/Land;
- Language Groups or other geo-cultural communities;
- Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, and the names of other cultural practices.
- 'First Peoples' or 'First Nations' are also recognised as respectful terms that encompass the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities.
- The term 'Indigenous' can be considered disrespectful and offensive to some due to its connotations with flora and fauna.
- Avoid using 'disadvantaged', 'native Australians', 'Aborigines' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Assimilationist terms such as 'full-blood,' 'half-caste' and 'quarter-caste' are extremely offensive and should never be used.
- Skin colour is not a determiner of someone's Aboriginality and connection to their culture. This is particularly relevant to First Nations peoples affected by the Stolen Generation.

Meaning of the Aboriginal flag:

- The Aboriginal flag, designed in proportions approximating one to two, is divided horizontally into equal halves of black (top) and red (bottom), and has a yellow circle in the centre.
- The black symbolizes the Aboriginal peoples.
- The red represents the land and the colour of ochre used in Aboriginal ceremonies.
- The circle of yellow represents the sun, the constant renewer of life.

References:

- [Common Ground](#); [Parks Australia](#); [Indigenous Gov](#); [AHCSA](#) ; [Australians Together](#) ; [Narragunnawali](#) ; [Aboriginal Culture](#) ; [Kooricurriculum](#)