

Knowledge area:



Dreaming

## TEACHING NOTES





# The Story of the Southern Cross (Video)

Text type: narrative, spoken, online, multimodal

### VISUAL STIMULUS FOCUS

*The Story of the Southern Cross* is a Dreaming story that uses amazing animated imagery of Australian landscapes, people and animals. It includes Dreaming spirits, music and a moral lesson.

### PRIOR TO VIEWING

-  Introduce the *The Story of the Southern Cross* video to students.
-  Start the video on the website.
-  To engage your students, ask them if they have ever seen the star systems or patterns in the Australian night sky.
-  Ask the students if they know a great Aussie symbol that has the Southern Cross on it. (Answer: The Australian National Flag)

### Background

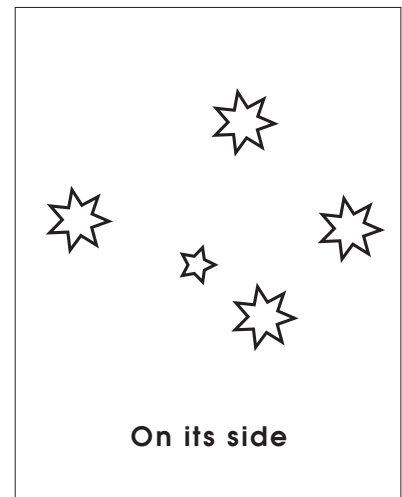
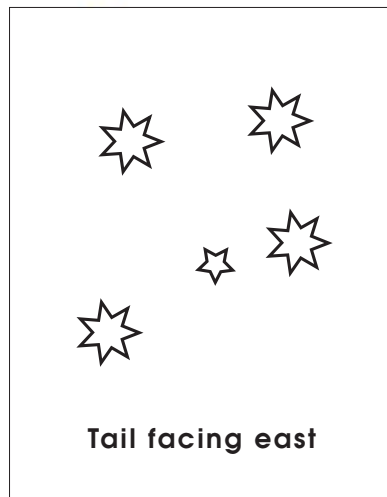
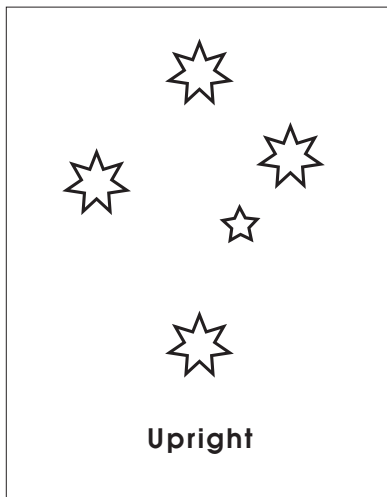
- *The Story of the Southern Cross* is an animated Dreaming story that is part of the *Bobtales* video series. The story is from the Wilman (Wheel-man) people of the South West region of Western Australia near Perth.

#### The Southern Cross

- *The constellation, Crux Australis, or the Southern Cross, was regularly used for navigation down through the ages, by both European navigators and the Aboriginal people. It lies a third of the way between the equator and the southern celestial pole.*

*Its stars vary in brightness, one being of the first magnitude, two of the second magnitude, and one of the third magnitude. The neighbouring stars Alpha and Beta Centauri are known as the Pointers.<sup>1</sup>*

- The Southern Cross star system can only be found in the Southern Hemisphere and is a great way to find south in the night sky. Many Aboriginal groups used the Southern Cross to tell the time — they would say its tail is facing this way or that way, or ‘wake me when the Cross turns over’. By doing this, they could be as accurate as every two hours throughout the night.



### The southern sky

- *The southern sky is striking compared to that of the Northern hemisphere, often dominated by the magnificent river of the Milky Way weaving across the zenith, crossed by numerous dust lanes. For those living in Australia before the advent of streetlights, the night sky would be an important and integral part of their understanding of the world. Naturally, they would notice that particular stars or patterns are seen only at certain times of the year. Furthermore, since many chose to travel in the cool of the night, they would quickly find that stars are useful for navigation.<sup>2</sup>*

### Aboriginal astronomy

- *Since Aboriginal cultures stretch back unbroken for 50,000 years or more, it has been suggested ... that the Australian Aboriginal people were the world's first astronomers.<sup>3</sup>*
- *Across Australia there are many different rich and vibrant Aboriginal cultures, each with its own astronomy. But there are common threads. Many have stories of a female Sun who warmed the land, and a male Moon who was once a young slim man (the waxing crescent Moon), but grew fat and lazy (the*

*full Moon). But then he broke the law, and was attacked by his people, resulting in his death (the new Moon). After remaining dead for 3 days, he rose again to repeat the cycle, and continues doing so till this day. The Kuwema [Coo-we-ma] people in the Northern Territory say that he grows fat at each full moon by devouring the spirits of those who disobey the tribal laws.<sup>4</sup>*

### Astronomy as a predictor

- *Some Aboriginal people use the sky as a calendar to tell them when it's time to move to a new place and a new food supply. The Boorong people in Victoria know that when the "Mallee-fowl" constellation (Lyra) disappears in October, to "sit with the Sun", it's time to start gathering her eggs on Earth. Other groups know that when Orion first appears in the sky, the Dingo puppies are about to be born.<sup>5</sup>*

### Dreaming stories

- *Dreaming stories are the moral and learning lessons about this time of creation (The Dreaming).*

*Dreaming stories tell of the creation by supernatural spirits the world and of everything within it. Those spirits, sometimes called*

*Ancestral Beings, emerged at the dawn of creation from the pre-existing formless earth, from spirit homes in the sky or from other far-off places. Some Ancestral Beings assumed forms and identities that combined features of humans with species [animals].<sup>6</sup>*

#### A Dreaming story about the Sun

- *In the duality of opposites that underlies much of Aboriginal belief, women are equated with light, life and wisdom, whereas men are equated with darkness, the shade, the night and death. So the sun is almost always considered to be female, and thus is connected with menstruation [fertility] myths as well as light and warmth. In the beginning the Earth was dark and beings had to find their way in the darkness with torches when seeking food and water. A Koori [NSW Aboriginal] sun myth relates how a woman, Kyowee [Kyow-wee], left her small son sleeping in a cave while she went for yams. Without the sun there was little vegetation growing and she had to search long and hard. The ground was broken by gullies and ravines, and when she went on and on, until she reached the end of the world and stepped off the Earth and into the dark land above. Each day, she travels the vast plain, holding her torch above her head, looking for her son. It is her torch that lights up the whole world as she crosses the plain.<sup>7</sup>*

#### Country and place

**Aboriginal people's belief is that they have been in Australia since time began.**

- In Australia, there are two Australian Indigenous peoples — Aboriginal people who have been here for over 50,000 years and Torres Strait Islanders who have been here for over 10,000 years. Both of these cultural groups have many beliefs, traditions and separation of tribal areas in common and were most certainly participating in the trade of goods and materials over a very long period. These commonalities tie these two majestic cultures together and allow us to combine their traditional teachings into one glorious circle that encapsulates all the components of their cultural existence and survival for thousands of years.
- 'Although ancient Indigenous beliefs and cultural practices vary according to region, all language groups share a common world view that the land, sea and other natural phenomena are living things.<sup>8</sup> Every tree, waterway or even a bush possesses the living essence of their ancestors (also known as spiritual beings, ancestral beings or creation beings). These ancestors are represented and acknowledged in a huge collection of Dreaming stories, songs, carvings, songlines and artwork across this country.

### SHARED VIEWING

In the video *The Story of the Southern Cross*, Indigenous Australian Stephen (Baamba) Albert tells us that this animated Dreaming story is from the Wiilman (*Wheel-man*) people of the South West region of Western Australia (near Perth). The Wiilman are a dialectical group of the Noongar (*Noon-gahh*) people of Western Australia.

In the story, a group of girls sent on a special errand disobey instructions and are blown up into the sky to join the stars. It is one version of a traditional Aboriginal story about how the Southern Cross came into being and why it is different from other stars.

*The Story of the Southern Cross* includes full narration to assist teachers with the enunciation of Aboriginal language and introduces Aboriginal English to students.

30 SEC



Stephen (Baamba) Albert explains that this is a story from the Wiilman people of Western Australia about some curious girls who disobeyed their parents.

(Dreaming stories are handed down to children from their parents and Elders to show the location of sacred places, how to stay safe, and to teach the difference between good and bad behaviour. The moral of the story is that it is important to do as you are told.)

1 MIN 2 SEC



The Southern Cross is shown to be different from the other stars because they are special women.

(Knowledge of where star patterns and planets were positioned in the sky at certain times of the year was very important for Indigenous Australians. This knowledge helped them to find their way in the dark, tell the time and know what the weather would be like. Many of their Dreaming stories are about how the stars and planets were made.)

1 MIN 12 SEC



The women belong to a tribe that live near the sea where the earth and the water touch the sky. They set up camp nearer to the trees than the river.

1 MIN 37 SEC



The water is getting low in the camp, so the Elders send four girls to go get water from the river. They are given strict instructions not to go near the sacred waterhole as it is forbidden to women.

1 MIN 57 SEC



The girls are curious, so instead of going to the river they go to the sacred waterhole and begin to play.

2 MIN 25 SEC



The girls have been away for a long time and the babies in the camp are getting thirsty, so the old men decide to look for them.

3 MIN



The men find the girls playing near the forbidden waterhole. The men are angry and start to chase the girls home.

3 MIN 23 SEC



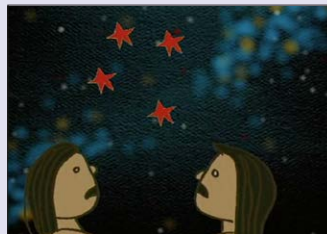
The girls run away from the men. As they run, a big wind springs up and blows the girls up into the sky.

3 MIN 51 SEC



The angry men throw their spears into the sky and the girls spread out to avoid them, creating the Southern Cross constellation.

4 MIN 8 SEC



The narrator explains that the girls are still in the sky to this day, too frightened to come down. Noongar parents tell their children this story to make sure they do as they are told and to remember the disobedient girls who have to spend the rest of their days living among the stars.

(Discuss with your students that Dreaming stories are always teaching lessons. They are often scary because no-one could write them down and therefore they had to make sure children remembered them to stay safe. Noongar is a word that describes all Aboriginal people who come from any language groups in the South West of the state of Western Australia.)

## AFTER VIEWING DISCUSSION

- Ask the students if they have any other ideas of how ancient Australians made use of the night sky.
  - Explain that Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people applied knowledge of particular stars and constellations for many important purposes, including:
    - a calendar for the changing seasons
    - a survival strategy if lost (Aboriginal people used the stars and planets like a map)
    - teaching their law/rules through stories about the skyworlds
  - as subjects of legends to show the creation time and how it came about
  - to tell the time.
- It was also cooler to travel at night when the stars were visible.<sup>9</sup>
- Ask the students why they think Ancient Australians tell *The Story of the Southern Cross* to the young people. (Answer: The moral intention of the story is to teach children to always do as you are told, otherwise you could end up in trouble just like the four girls who are now up in the sky too frightened to come down.)

- Discuss the different flags of Australia and their elements with the students.



### Australian National Flag

- The flag has a dark blue background.
- The five white stars on the right side represent the Southern Cross constellation.
- The white seven-pointed star represents the six states of Australia and the territories.
- The Union Jack (flag of the United Kingdom) appears in the top left corner.



### Torres Strait Islander Flag

- The colour **green** is for the land.
- The **dharri** or **deri** [headdress] is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islanders.
- The **black** represents the people.

- The **blue** is for the sea.
- The **five-pointed star** represents the island groups [of the Torres Strait]. Used in navigation, the star is also an important symbol for the sea-faring Torres Strait Islander people [who used the night sky].
- The colour **white** of the star represents peace.<sup>10</sup>



### Aboriginal Flag

- The **black** symbolises Aboriginal people.
- The **yellow** represents the sun, the constant re-newer of life.
- **Red** depicts the earth and people's relationship to the land. It also represents ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.<sup>11</sup>
- A great way to remember which way the Aboriginal flag goes (black on top) is to think of this story taught to us by an amazing Elder — dark-skinned people of ancient Australia walking on top of the red earth, underneath the great sun.

## SUPPORTING WORKSHEETS



### Worksheet 1: The Australian Flag and the Southern Cross

A colour-in and drawing activity where students colour in the Australian flag and design a flag that includes the Southern Cross constellation.



### Worksheet 2: Indigenous Flags of Australia

A colour-in activity where students colour in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

## CURRICULUM

### HISTORY

#### Content description

How the stories of families and the past can be communicated, for example, through photographs, artefacts, books, oral histories, digital media and museums (ACHASSK013)

#### Elaboration

- engaging with the oral traditions, painting and music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and recognising that the past is communicated through stories passed down from generation to generation

### GEOGRAPHY

#### Content description

The Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country/Place on which the school is located and why Country/Place is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHASSK016)

#### Elaboration

- identifying and using the name of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language group
- identifying how and why the words 'Country/Place' are used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for the places to which they belong
- inviting members of the traditional owner group to talk about Country/Place and places of cultural and historical significance to the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community in the local neighbourhood, suburb, town or rural area

### SCIENCE

#### Content description

Daily and seasonal changes in our environment affect everyday life (ACSSU004)

#### Elaboration

- learning how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of time and weather patterns explain how things happen in the world around them



## KNOWLEDGE AREAS AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

### History

In the story, a group of girls sent on a special errand disobey instructions and are blown up into the sky to join the stars. It is one version of a traditional Aboriginal story about how the Southern Cross came into being and why it is different from other stars. (ACHASSK013)

### Geography

This animated Dreaming story is from the Wiilman (Wheel-man) people of the South West region of Western Australia (near Perth). The Wiilman are a dialectical group of the Noongar people of Western Australia. (ACHASSK016)

### Science

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people applied knowledge of particular stars and constellations for many important purposes, including a calendar for the changing seasons.

(ACSSU004)

## REFERENCES

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