The Sand Symbols (Video)

Text type: narrative, written, online, multimodal

VISUAL STIMULUS FOCUS

The Sand Symbols is a story about an Aboriginal Elder sharing cultural and historical knowledge with her grandchildren, and discovering comparisons between modern and traditional Australian societies.

PRIOR TO VIEWING

- Introduce the video The Sand Symbols to the students.
- Start the video on the website.
- Have the students think about what clues the name of book gives them about the type of story it is.
- Ask the students:
  - When you hear the word ‘symbols’ — can you think of any modern-day symbols you know about (e.g. ♥ ✔ ✗ $ + ? ◊) ?
  - Why is it important to know about symbols used by Aboriginal people? (Answer: They tell stories, relay information about events big and small, and communicate history.)
  - Why do you believe the Aboriginal people of Australia and other Indigenous people across the world used symbols to communicate?

Background

- The Sand Symbols introduces Aboriginal family heritage, language, traditional daily lives, sand drawings and symbols into the classroom. In the story, Aboriginal Elder Sarah shows how the features of the landscape can be represented through art.
- Aboriginal art was meaningful. Every dot, every dash and every colour had a meaning. It could range from a single line to a complex image of a hunting scene. Aboriginal people did not do art as a hobby. Their art told of the Dreaming, their way of life, traditions and laws.
- Australia’s world-famous Aboriginal rock art can be found all over the country, from Tasmania to the Kimberley. The paintings depict everyday events such as hunting and corroborees, as well as myths and legends. Fish, wombats, kangaroos and snakes weave their way across the rock, as do the often haunting Dreamtime figures of lightning spirits, serpents and sky-beings.1
• Traditional Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander society bartered, shared, predicted and grouped people and items of importance. When bartering or exchanging items, it was important to present your goods at their very best so you could trade up to an item of more value. This involved months of preparation time spent carving, painting and decorating tools and weapons.

**SHARED VIEWING**

Explain to the students that *The Sand Symbols* is a great storybook to learn about the meanings of some of the art symbols found in Aboriginal art. A wonderful book with bold Aboriginal art images, it is read by the Aboriginal author, Ms Nola Turner-Jensen.

In the story, we learn that traditional Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander paintings depict everyday events such as hunting and corroborees, as well as myths and legends. We discover the importance of handing down the knowledge of Aboriginal art, which is the only way to keep it alive.

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**Pages 2 to 3**

The author introduces the main characters of the story — Aboriginal Elder Sarah and her grandchildren.

**Pages 4 to 5**

Sarah introduces the theme of the story and the props she will use to communicate with the children.
Pages 6 to 7

Sarah draws her first Aboriginal symbols in the sand — a short trip and long trip that is like a map.

Pages 8 to 9

Sarah draws the images of the Moon and the Sun, and explains the importance of both sky beings and the image on the Aboriginal flag.

Pages 10 to 11

Sarah explains the dreaming spirit of the Rainbow Serpent.

Pages 12 to 13

Sarah explains the symbol for rain, and the critical importance of water to the Aboriginal people.
Sarah educates the children about the oceans and how Aboriginal people across the country bartered for items they needed.

Sarah tells the children again about the importance of water and the skills needed to locate water even in the driest of places.

Sarah introduces some animal tracks and tells about one way that Aboriginal people used hunting tricks to catch ducks.

Sarah explains the symbol of smoke from the thousands of camp fires that once burned across this country.
Sarah draws a large waterhole and gets the children to think about why this place would be great for Aboriginal people to hunt at.

The children are given a go at coming up with an Aboriginal symbol for clouds.

Sarah explains about the symbols used to describe places and actions in Aboriginal paintings.

Sarah shows the children the Aboriginal symbol for stars.
ACTIVITY

Create Cave Art (use Worksheets 1–4)

**STEP 1**
Cover all of one blank page with a light-coloured crayon.

**STEP 2**
Cover all of the light-coloured crayon background with a thick layer of dark crayon.

**STEP 3**
Photocopy the templates provided on Worksheets 1–4 onto thick card then cut them out.

**STEP 4**
Take one or more of the templates and place them onto the coloured sheet. Trace around the templates with a stick or a similar object to scrape away the dark crayon and show the lighter colour underneath.

**STEP 5**
Hold up the paper to a light to let the lighter colour shine through and reveal the cave art.

EXTENSION IDEAS

Cave Art Stencils (use Worksheets 1–4)

Create an effect similar to paint blowing using sprinkled flour.

**STEP 1**
Place the stencils over the dark-crayon layer.

**STEP 2**
Cover the area around the stencils with glue.

**STEP 3**
Sprinkle white flour all over the paper. Shake off the excess flour to reveal amazing cave art stencils.

AFTER VIEWING DISCUSSION

- Ask the students if they think it is important to know the meanings of Aboriginal art symbols. Why or why not?
- Explain to the students that Aboriginal art is made up of symbols that relay stories and information — even the smallest dot means a rock, grass, a different coloured soil, etc.
• Choose a few symbols from the story with the students and discuss their meanings.

• Discuss with the students whether they think Aboriginal people had money hundreds of years ago. (Answer: No. The swapping or bartering of goods was common practice across all of Australia — exchanging tools or weapons you spend months making was a large part of the traditional Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander daily lives.)

SUPPORTING WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 1: Cave Art — Fish
A colouring activity where students colour in the fish. *(The fish template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create Your Own Cave Art’.*)

Worksheet 2: Cave Art — Goanna
A colouring activity where students colour in the goanna. *(The goanna template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create Your Own Cave Art’.*)

Worksheet 3: Cave Art — Boomerang and Spear
A colouring activity where students colour in the boomerang and spear. *(The boomerang and spear template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create Your Own Cave Art’.*)

Worksheet 4: Cave Art — Snake
A colouring activity where students colour in the snake. *(The snake template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create Your Own Cave Art’.*)

Worksheet 5: Decorating with Ochre
A drawing and colouring activity where students decorate a bracelet made from native beads.
## ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

Learning Aboriginal Art Symbols 1


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### CURRICULUM

#### HISTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How the stories of families and the past can be communicated, for example, through</td>
<td>• engaging with the oral traditions, painting and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photographs, artefacts, books, oral histories, digital media and museums (ACHASSK013)</td>
<td>music of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and recognising that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the past is communicated through stories passed down from generation to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>generation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### GEOGRAPHY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The representation of the location of places and their features on simple maps and</td>
<td>• identifying the ways Aboriginal and Torres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>models (ACHASSK014)</td>
<td>Islander Peoples represent the location of Country/Place and their features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(for example, by inscriptions on stone, stories, sand drawings, paintings,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>song, music and dance)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### VISUAL ARTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explore ideas, experiences, observations and imagination to create visual artworks</td>
<td>• identifying and using visual conventions in their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and design, including considering ideas in artworks by Aboriginal and Torres</td>
<td>artworks after investigating different art, craft and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strait Islander artists (ACAVAM106)</td>
<td>design styles from other cultures and times, for example, Expressionism,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fauvism, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to visual artworks and consider where and why people make visual artworks</td>
<td>• identifying where they might experience art in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>starting with visual artworks from Australia, including visual artworks of</td>
<td>their lives and communities, for example, keeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR109)</td>
<td>a diary of ‘art experiences’ and combining to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>create a class list and then discussing how visual</td>
</tr>
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<td>artworks sustain and communicate cultural</td>
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<td></td>
<td>knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Considering viewpoints – societies and cultures: For example – Where is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>this artwork from and why was it made? Who made the artworks? Where and how</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are they displayed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**KNOWLEDGE AREAS AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

**History**

*The Sand Symbols* tells the story of traditional Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander paintings that depict everyday events such as hunting and corroborees, as well as myths and legends. We discover the importance of handing down the knowledge of Aboriginal art, which is the only way to keep it alive. *(ACHASSK013)*

**Geography**

*The Sand Symbols* introduces Aboriginal family heritage, language, traditional daily lives, sand drawings and symbols into the classroom. Aboriginal Elder Sarah shows how the features of the landscape can be represented through art. *(ACHASSK014)*

**Visual Arts**

Students complete activities to emulate Aboriginal cave art, such as X-ray art and paint blowing. They discuss symbols from the story and their meanings, and learn about the connection between Aboriginal art symmetry, symbolism and iconography. *(ACAVAM106)*

Aboriginal art was meaningful. Every dot, every dash and every colour had a meaning. It could range from a single line to a complex image of a hunting scene. Aboriginal people did not do art as a hobby. Their art told of the Dreaming, their way of life, traditions and laws. *(ACAVAR109)*

**REFERENCE**