

Knowledge area:



Art Styles

TEACHING NOTES





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 the 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

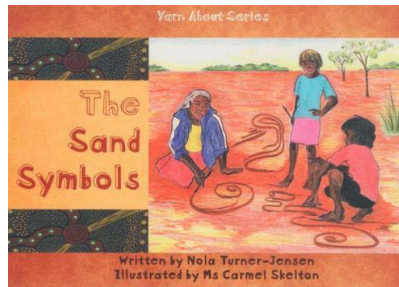
- Traditional Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander society bartered, shared, predicted and grouped people and items of importance. When bartering or exchanging items, it was important to present your

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.

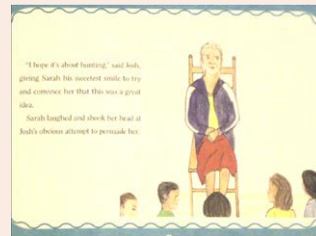
SHARED VIEWING

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.

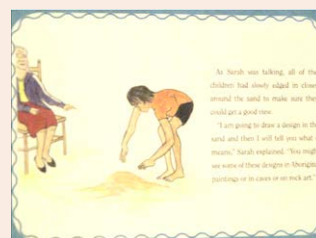
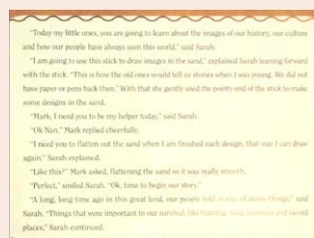


Pages 2 to 3



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

"The first drawing is one we sometimes use for going on a journey," said Sarah as she used the stick to make some designs in the sand.

"The circles show us where we camp or resting places and the lines that join these tell us how far we need to go," explained Sarah.

"Just like dad's navigator system," said Liam.

"A little like it," laughed Sarah. "Sure doesn't cost as much."




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

Pages 8 to 9

Next Sarah drew the Moon and the Sun.

"The Moon showed our people the way at night and also helped us to know time," said Sarah. "Our people would look at the different shapes of the moon to know how long they had been away on a journey or how long they had been out hunting."



"This is the Sun, one of our greatest ancestors and the giver of life," Sarah told the children.

"Without these two great spirits we would live in a world of darkness," Sarah said in a soft voice.

"The Sun is so important to our people that it holds centre place on our Australian Aboriginal flag."



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 then drew a snake in the sand.

"Aahh, the Rainbow Serpent," said Sarah in awe.

"Our people believed that their world was first made flat and it was the great and powerful Rainbow Serpent that dug through the earth to make the rivers and lakes. It was the Rainbow Serpent that pushed huge parts of the land together to make the mountains and the hills," said Sarah.

"Snakes are cool," added Liam, drawing his own snake in the dirt in front of him.

"Yes, my little man, they sure are!" smiled Sarah.



Sarah explains the dreaming spirit of the Rainbow Serpent.

Pages 12 to 13

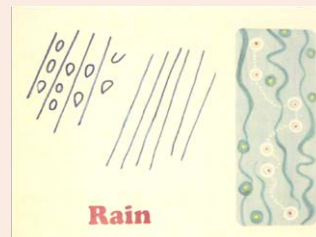
"One of the most precious of all things was water and our people had many ways of drawing images of water," Sarah explained.

"This drawing represents the drops of water the great spirits send us from the sky. What do you think it is?" asked Sarah.

"Rain!" the children all yelled at once, craning their necks to see the sand drawings.

"Yes, rain," said Sarah, as she waited for Mark to flatten out the sand.

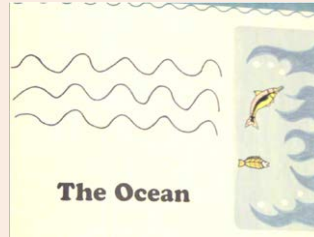
"I think I have very clever grandchildren," said Sarah smiling down at their beaming little faces.



Sarah explains the symbol for rain, and the critical importance of water to the Aboriginal people.

Pages 14 to 15

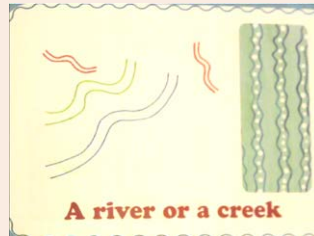
"Not all Aboriginal people lived in the desert or the bush," Sarah explained. "This drawing represents the ocean that surrounds our great island home."
 "The oceans fed many of our people and the ocean dwellers snopped fish, crabs and shells with the desert and bush people," she added.
 "Why didn't they just eat them?" asked Josh.
 "There was no such thing as money then, Josh," replied Sarah.
 "All our people would swap for things we needed," Sarah added.
 "If we lived in the mountains where there were no crabs or shells, we would swap with the tribes that lived near the ocean for these things. We might give them some timber or spears. That way both of us would get what we needed."
 "Like kids do," said George.
 "Yes, our people were as innocent as children in lots of ways," agreed Sarah. "They had a very simple life, much less complicated than our people of today," said Sarah as a look of sadness fell on her face.



Sarah educates the children about the oceans and how Aboriginal people across the country bartered for items they needed.

Pages 16 to 17

"Remember when I said the most precious of all things was water and our people had many ways of drawing images of water?" asked Sarah.
 "This drawing shows the rivers and creeks," said Sarah. "Our people know where water was, even in the desert."
 "We could read the signs of the land to show us where the water was hiding," Sarah added.
 "We also know which plants kept the water inside them. Our wise elders would show us how to get the water from the leaves or in the roots of the plants," she explained.



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

Pages 18 to 19

"Our people were also excellent hunters and trackers," Sarah said proudly. "These drawings are about tracks and the animals that made them," Sarah continued.
 "We could track animals over the rocks, when it snowed and even through the snow."
 "Our people used clever tricks to catch animals."
 "Like what?" George asked.
 "Like swimming under water in a billabong, breathing through the stem of a water lily and catching swimming ducks by their legs," replied Sarah.
 "Wow, that is pretty clever," said George, and all the other children nodded in agreement.



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

Pages 20 to 21

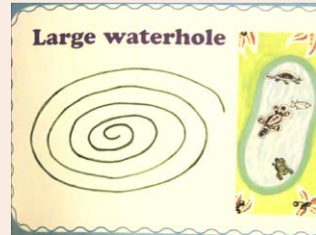
Next Sarah drew 4 wiggly lines all in a row.
 "Can you children tell me what these might be?" asked Sarah.
 "Snakes," said Josh.
 "Worms," said Georgie.
 Sarah shook her head.
 "Vines from a tree," suggested Ryle.
 Again Sarah shook her head.
 "Fire," yelled Max and Liam.
 "Close," replied Sarah.
 "Is it smoke?" asked Mark.
 "Yes, well done all of you," laughed Sarah. "These lines show the smoke rising up from the camp fires."



Sarah explains the symbol of smoke from the thousands of camp fires that once burned across this country.

Pages 22 to 23

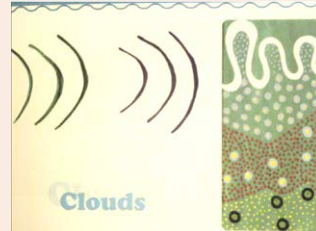
"I am going to draw another water picture," said Sarah.
 "You start in the centre and then work your way outwards," Sarah explained
 as she moved the stick around and around.
 "This drawing shows a large waterhole, which would have been very
 important drinking water for our people. It also would have been a good place
 to hunt for food," Sarah added.
 "Why would it have been good for hunting, my children?" asked Sarah.
 "Because the animals would come to get water too," said Kyle smugly.
 "Yeah," said Josh. "They come to have a drink and then the circles would
 spear them or catch them in their nets, hey Nan?" Josh added confidently.
 "Very well explained Josh, well done to you too Kyle," nodded Sarah.



Sarah draws a large waterhole and gets the children to think about why this place would be great for Aboriginal people to hunt at.

Pages 24 to 25

"Who would like to have a turn to draw some clouds?" asked Sarah.
 Of course, everyone put their hands up and shouted excitedly -- me, me, I do.
 Sarah wanted to be fair, so she asked the children to think of a number between
 one and ten.
 The first child to guess the number she was thinking would get to go first.
 Max guessed number three and he drew some big round circles.
 The children all guessed again and Mark won a go.
 Mark drew puffy, fat clouds.
 "Well done Mark and Max, great job," said Sarah kindly.
 "It is my turn now," and with that Sarah drew some simple lines shaped like
 backward letter Cs.
 "See how they seem to be floating, just like clouds. Children, so simple yet they
 really remind you of clouds," said Sarah.



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

Pages 26 to 27

This shape sometimes represents a resting or sitting
 down place," Sarah explained as she used the stick to draw
 a circle shape with lines running off it.
 "If you were telling a story with your painting or rock
 art this would show when a tribe or group of people would
 camp or stay over while they travel on a longer journey,"
 said Sarah.
 "What if it rained?" asked Kyle.
 "They would build a shelter made from branches and
 leaves and be perfectly dry and safe," replied Sarah.
 "Now my lovely children, one of my favourite drawings,"
 said Sarah with a smile.
 Sarah looked down at little Max and she could see he was
 starting to lean on Google and looking very sheepy.



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

Pages 28 to 29

"Oh, well let's not sit here all day," laughed Sarah shakily standing up. "Let's go and get our
 tuckers."
 All the children leaped to their feet and headed straight for the delicious smelling BBQ where
 their mums and dads had gathered for a swim.
 Mark stopped and came back to take Sarah by the hand.
 Sarah smiled a thank-you to her lovely boy.
 "I really liked that story, Nan," said Mark.
 "I'm glad my boy," smiled Sarah.

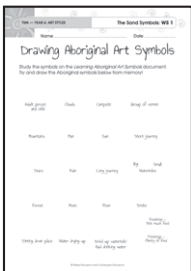


Sarah shows the children the Aboriginal symbol for stars.

AFTER VIEWING DISCUSSION

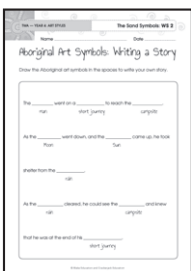
- Ask the students if they think it is important to know the meanings of Aboriginal art symbols. Why or why not?
- Explain to the students that Aboriginal art is made up of symbols that relay stories and information — even the smallest dot means a rock, grass, a different coloured soil, etc.
- Choose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

A drawing activity where students draw different Aboriginal art symbols that they have memorised. (The symbols and patterns can be found in the Learning Aboriginal Art Symbols I document in the Additional Resources section.)



Worksheet 2: Aboriginal Art Symbols — Writing a Story

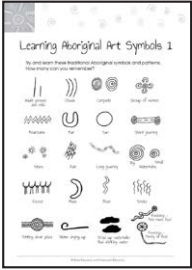
A reading and writing activity where students draw Aboriginal art symbols to complete the story.



Worksheet 3: Aboriginal Art Symbols — Reading a Story

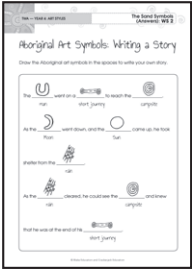
A reading and writing activity where students recognise Aboriginal art symbols to complete the story.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

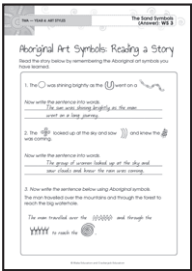


Learning Aboriginal Art Symbols I

<http://www.crackerjackeducation.com.au/resources/resource-documents-learning-aboriginal-art-symbols-I/>



Worksheet 2: Aboriginal Art Symbols — Writing a Story (Answers)



Worksheet 3: Aboriginal Art Symbols — Reading a Story (Answers)

CURRICULUM

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES	
Content description	Elaboration
Recognise different types of data and explore how the same data can be represented in different ways (ACTDIK008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> exploring codes and symbols that are representations of data; for example, Morse code and semaphore and how similar symbols in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art can represent different concepts depending on the context, for example three circles, drawn as lines, can represent ants, fruit, flowers or eggs depending on the art region
VISUAL ARTS	
Content description	Elaboration
Explore ideas and artworks from different cultures and times, including artwork by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to use as inspiration for their own representations (ACAVAMI10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering viewpoints – meanings and interpretations: For example – What is this painting telling us about the past? How does the artwork use visual conventions to convey meaning? How did the artist work within a space, and at this time? How and why did they innovate their practice?

KNOWLEDGE AREAS AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Digital Technologies

Students discuss symbols from the story and their meanings. They learn about the connection between Aboriginal art symmetry, symbolism and iconography. (ACTDIK008)

Visual Arts

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. (ACAVAM110)

REFERENCE

1. Jutta Malnic and Elaine Godden, *Rock Paintings of Aboriginal Australia* (Chatswood, NSW: New Holland, 2015).