

Knowledge area:



Food Gathering

TEACHING NOTES

Traditional Aboriginal Tools (eBook)

Text type: written, online, multimodal

VISUAL STIMULUS FOCUS

Traditional Aboriginal Tools is an informative poem using descriptive language to explain the different Aboriginal tools, how they were used and the natural materials they were made from.

PRIOR TO VIEWING

-  Introduce the *Traditional Aboriginal Tools* eBook to students.
-  Start the eBook on the website.
-  To engage your students, ask them if they can think of any tools or weapons Aboriginal people might have used thousands of years ago.

Background

- Thousands of years ago, ancient Australians could only make their tools using the materials nature provided. These materials included wood from trees, stone, vines from plants, glue from the sticky sap that leaks out of certain trees, and animal bones.
- Often the Aboriginal men carried only a spear thrower, spears, and those weapons needed to catch the animals' native to their territory. The women carried the rest — babies, household utensils — to leave the men free to use their weapons.¹
- Aboriginal people used the natural resources around them to make things that they needed. Have the students think about what Aboriginal people might have used these materials for: string, wood, stone, bone, animal skin. Their actual uses are listed here.
 - **String, cord and hair:** nets, baskets, mats and fishing lines
 - **Wood and bark:** dishes, shields, spears, boomerangs, dugout canoes and rafts
 - **Stone:** tools to use as weapons, or to cut and carve woods
 - **Pebbles and stones:** tools to grind seeds to flour
 - **Bone:** spear points and needles to sew animal skins
 - **Animal skins:** vessels to carry water.²
- *Clubs, nets, snares and spears were used to catch different types of animals and birds ... Large animals were speared or clubbed and smaller ones were caught in pits and nets ... Fish were speared, or caught with traps.³ Sometimes plant juices were added to water so the fish were knocked out for a short while and would float to the top.*

SHARED VIEWING

Read the poem with students. Explain that this is a rhyming poem about the history and uses of a selection of tools and weapons that Aboriginal people have made and used for thousands of years.



Traditional Aboriginal Tools Poem

Ancient axes made of stone,
Spear tips made from animal bone.

Plant's gum instead of glue,
Brilliantly crafted just like new.

Carved shields made from a tree,
Feathers and seeds make jewellery.

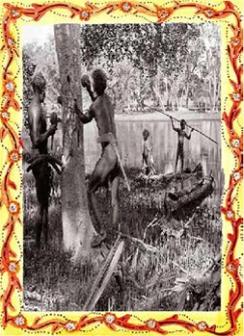
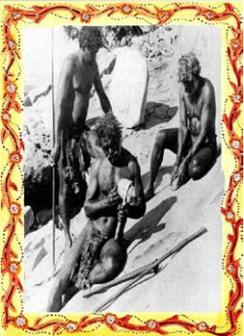
Stone clubs that stun, cut and hit,
Boomerangs, nets and a digging stick.

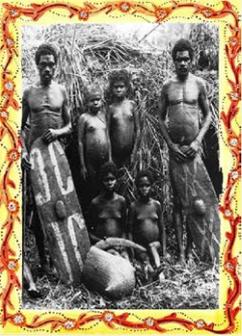
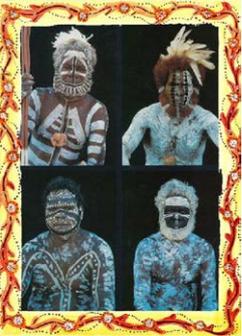
Grinding stones to make the bread,
Dilly bags made from plant's thread.

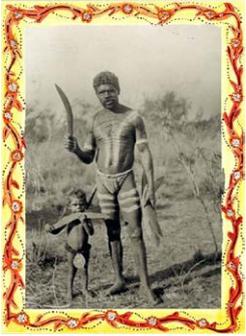
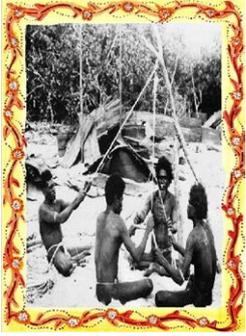
Chisels, knives to make a canoe,
Woomera to hunt the emu.

Aboriginal man's greatest skills,
No hammers, nails or electric drills.

Only nature's gifts were there to choose,
No tools, no feast of kangaroos.

| PAGE | EXPLANATION |
|--|--|
| <p>1</p>  | <p>In Australia, axes are usually hatchets (designed for one-handed use). They have a stone head with a ground cutting edge at one end, and a handle about 30 cm long and 25 to 35 mm thick. Some axes have been found in the Northern Territory dating back 20,000 years.</p> <p>Both men and women use hatchets for a wide range of everyday tasks, such as stripping bark off trees and cutting toe holes, chopping through small branches, and extracting honeycomb and small game from trees and fallen logs. The butt end of the hatchet was used as a hammer and pounder. When turned on its side, a hatchet served as an anvil.</p> |
| <p>2</p>  | <p>The range of spears mainly used includes single unbarbed shafts, single shafts with barbs cut into the shaft, single shafts with detachable barbs and shafts with attached spearheads.</p> <p>Parallel to these spear types is the range of harpoons — for hunting turtle and dugong, for example. These had an attached rope that prevented the wounded animal from swimming away.</p> <p>Spear length, weight and design depended on the intended use (e.g. for hunting, fishing, warfare or ceremony). The materials used to make these spears were wood, reed, bamboo, cane and grass tree stems. The weight of the spears ranged from about 50 g to 1.8 kg. The length ranged from about 1.5 m for thrusting spears, to up to 4 m for some hand-thrown spears.</p> |
| <p>3</p>  | <p>Aboriginal binding agents (or what modern-day populations refer to as glue) included spinifex resin or tree sap; Queensland Ironwood resin; supple pieces of wood, vine or cane; and beeswax from native beehives.</p> <p>Once made, many stone tools were hafted, or fitted with handles, using one of the above methods. Binding agents were necessary to bond the head and handles of tools such as axes and hatchets.</p> |
| <p>4</p>  | <p><i>Full use was made of natural resources to produce whatever possessions were needed ... String, cord and hair were woven into nets, baskets, mats and fishing lines ... Wood and bark were used to make dishes, shields, spears and boomerangs, and also they made dugout canoes, and other types of watercraft, such as rafts. Stone was chipped to form tools that could be used as weapons, or to cut and carve wood ... Large pebbles and flat stones were used to grind seeds to flour and pieces of bone were sharpened into spear points, and even used as needles to sew together skin for cloaks and rugs ... skins of animals were treated to carry water.</i> ⁴</p> |

| PAGE | EXPLANATION |
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| <p data-bbox="325 286 347 318">5</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 286 1430 562">Shields were used for protection during warfare or individual fights. Two basic types were in use: a narrow one, made from a single piece of strong wood with a handle carved out, used as protection against clubs in hand-to-hand fighting; and a broad one, made from bark or light wood with a handle added, used as protection against thrown spears. Both types were decorated with engravings or paintings of each clan, or perhaps a personal design.</p> <p data-bbox="517 584 1406 658">In some tribal groups, a blank shield was given to an Aboriginal boy to paint immediately after his initiation.</p> <p data-bbox="517 680 1326 754">In war dances, the shield was held, as well as a club and fighting boomerang.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="325 801 347 833">6</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 801 1417 958">Jewellery or body decorations were very common among Aboriginal people for thousands of years. Seeds, shells, feathers, teeth, animal tails and claws, leaves, and bones were used for headbands, necklets, armbands, anklets and belts.</p> <p data-bbox="517 981 1394 1173">Throughout Australia, tufts of feathers set in tree gum were worn in the hair and on the arms of Aboriginal men. Piercing the nose in order to stick bones, feathers and other decorative objects through it was a decoration of beauty. The front tooth of males was traditionally knocked out when they went through initiation.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="325 1267 347 1299">7</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 1267 1426 1379">Clubs were made and used in most parts of Australia as weapons for hunting, as ceremonial objects for dances and (in the Western Desert) as musical instruments.</p> <p data-bbox="517 1402 1426 1594">Many types were made, and they came in all shapes and sizes. Generally, they were about 0.6 to 0.9 m long and were carved from a single piece of wood. They often had incisor cuts in the grips and heads. The head of a club included the cylinder, cone, bulb, pineapple, hook (like a boomerang), axe-head and spearhead.</p> <p data-bbox="517 1617 1394 1774">Frequently, the head, and sometimes the handle, finished in a sharp point, allowing the club to be used as a stabbing implement. Some clubs had curved handles, and many were used for throwing as well as striking.</p> |

| PAGE | EXPLANATION |
|---|--|
| <p data-bbox="325 286 347 318">8</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 286 1391 470"><i>The boomerang is more than a bent throwing stick that returns. It was first fashioned from the tree between heaven and earth; it symbolizes the rainbow and thus the rainbow snake; and the bend is the connection between the opposites, between heaven and earth, between Dreamtime and ceremony, the past and the present.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 488 1382 595"><i>In many communities, the boomerang is a musical instrument rather than a weapon. Two boomerangs clapped together provide the rhythmic accompaniment in ceremonies ... ⁵</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 613 1398 685">Boomerangs are made from tree roots or branches and they come in many different shapes and sizes.</p> <p data-bbox="517 703 1426 846">To make a boomerang requires experience in selecting the right branch or part of the tree, and patience and skill in shaping it to the desired curve and thickness. For the returning boomerang, the wood was heated and bent over the fire until it assumed the right degree of twist.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="325 900 347 931">9</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 900 1369 972"><i>Grinding stones were among the largest stone implements of Aboriginal people. They were used to crush, grind or pound different materials.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 990 1420 1173"><i>A main function of grinding stones was to process many types of food for cooking. Bracken fern roots, bulbs, tubers and berries, as well as insects, small mammals and reptiles were crushed and pulped on grinding stones before cooking. Some types of food are poisonous in their natural state, and could only be eaten after being crushed and washed.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 1191 1414 1299"><i>Milling seeds on large flat grinding stones was common in the drier areas of Australia, but less common in Victoria. Leaves and bark were crushed on grinding stones to make medicines.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 1317 1391 1460"><i>Aboriginal people also used small grinding stones to crush soft rocks and clays (such as ochre) to make pigments. The pigments were used to decorate bodies for ceremonies, to paint rock art and to decorate objects such as possum skin cloaks and weapons.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 1478 1407 1662"><i>Rocky outcrops are rare in some regions, so Aborigines imported slabs of suitable stone. But large grinding stones were rarely moved. Aborigines carried as little as possible when they moved camp and often left heavy items such as grinding stones as permanent camp 'furniture' to be used on the next visit. ⁶</i></p> |
| <p data-bbox="325 1724 357 1756">10</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 1724 1388 1832"><i>Aborigines' baskets are important containers, although they are often called dilly bags, they are more like baskets than bags, in that they are semi-rigid, unlike the string bags which are also made. ⁷</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 1850 1404 2033"><i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make a variety of objects from animal and plant fibres. Their skills in basket weaving, knotting and utilising animal skins are evidenced in everyday tools such as baskets for collecting food, nets for fishing and skin cloaks for warmth. They also make ceremonial items such as headgear. ⁸</i></p> |

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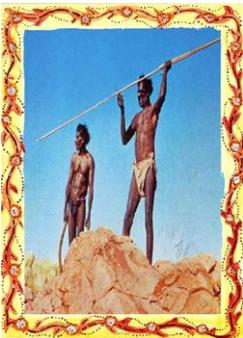
EXPLANATION

11



Chisels and knives are usually made from a flake of stone, or a shell with a sharp edge that can be used for cutting. However, several specialised knife forms are also known. In southwest Australia, resin was used to stick a series of stone flakes (later glass) to one side of a simple rod handle to create a knife known as a *taap*. A similar knife, armed with small shark teeth rather than stone flakes, was used for fighting on Cape York. Large, elongated and pointed flake-blades with either a resin (or resin and wood) handle are found in Central Australia. Knives kept in neat sheaths of soft bark, bound with fur string, were important items of exchange.

12



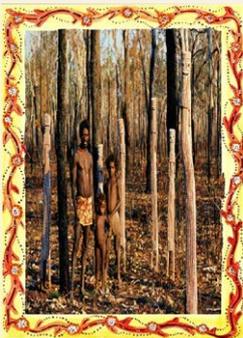
Tools for launching **spears** into flight are often called **woomeras** (a NSW Aboriginal word). They consist of a shaped wooden shaft with a handgrip at one end. At the opposite end, they are fitted with a short peg that fits into a concave notch cut into the base of the spear. With the peg in the notch, the spear is held along the length of the spear thrower.

Hunters all over the world have used spears but the “woomera” ... is a unique Aboriginal invention.

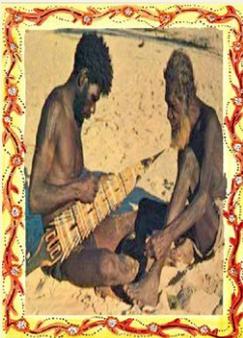
The Woomera was made of hollow wood from a hollow tree. It was used for making spears go faster and as a knife, chisel, graver, digging stick and for cutting cooked fish. It was also used for looking for grubs. The Aboriginals who used it were young men, and men when hunting.

The Woomera worked like a lever that projected spears with greater force than arm movements alone. It was like an extension of a man’s arm. ⁹

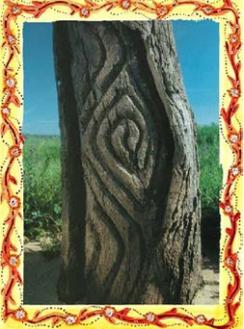
13 & 14



“Painted and carved representations of totemic animals and ancestral figures were created throughout ... Arnhem Land for use in particular ceremonial cycles.” Today in Northern and Southern Arnhem Land, and from the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Island, both soft (native hibiscus) and hard wood carvings of birds, animals, fish and ancestral heroes are made by many Aboriginal artists. ¹⁰



A single piece of wood was used to carve the shapes. The surfaces were then painted with a mix of natural ochres and commercial fixative in cross-hatched or dotted designs. In other cases, such as in north-eastern Arnhem Land, “surface designs are engraved into the wood through the painted surface with a sharp knife, exposing the pale wood beneath and contrasting with the painted patterns.” ¹¹

| PAGE | EXPLANATION |
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| <p data-bbox="316 286 354 318">15</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 286 1422 517"><i>Tree carving was a practice specific to the Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi tribes of NSW, used to mark sites of special ceremonial significance. Young men were given their own design as part of their initiation into manhood. That design was then carved into the tree by artists using stone tools. Many tree carvings were also used as grave markers, signposts for the burial sites of important tribal members.</i> ¹²</p> <p data-bbox="517 528 1422 725">Other names include arboglyphs, dendroglyphs and teleteglyphs. For burial sites the trees usually marked the grave of an important man. The design reflected the cultural heroes of this man and provided a pathway for his spirit to return to the sky world. The design faces the burial site to warn passers-by of the spiritual significance.</p> <p data-bbox="517 736 1214 770">Experts distinguish between 4 main styles of carved trees:</p> <ul data-bbox="587 781 1086 943" style="list-style-type: none"> • curvilinear lines (most frequent type), • chevrons (V-shaped designs), • figurative images (most scarce), • scrolls or circles. ¹³ |
| <p data-bbox="316 996 354 1028">16</p>  | <p data-bbox="517 996 1414 1267"><i>Ochre was the most important painting material used traditionally by Aboriginal people. It is mined from particular sites and is a crumbly to hard rock heavily coloured by iron oxide. The source material was traded extensively across Australia in the past, with some material travelling many hundreds or even thousands of kilometres from where it was mined to where it was used. It comes in a variety of colours from pale yellow to dark reddish-brown.</i></p> <p data-bbox="517 1279 1414 1357"><i>Paints are made by grinding the source rock to a powder and then mixing it with a fluid to bind it together.</i> ¹⁴</p> <p data-bbox="517 1368 1390 1525"><i>Aboriginal people also used small grinding stones to crush soft rocks and clays (such as ochre) to make pigments. The pigments were used to decorate bodies for ceremonies, to paint rock art and to decorate objects such as possum skin cloaks and weapons.</i> ¹⁵</p> |

AFTER VIEWING DISCUSSION

- Discuss with the class some of the main themes and events highlighted in the Teaching Notes. Ask the students:
 - How do you think ancient Australian people survived a thousand years ago? (Present the following examples: by fishing, growing native vegetables, hunting birds and game like kangaroos, knowing how to make tools from natural resources, and travelling by canoe.)
 - How do you think you would have been able to survive back then? What would be some of the foods you would have eaten in a time with no cafés, restaurants or grocery stores?
 - What do you think is meant by the word ‘tools’? What do you think of when you hear this word? (Suggest that they might think of a hammer, screwdriver or drill.)

- Discuss with the students how thousands of years ago ancient Australians could only make their tools using the materials that nature provided. These materials in

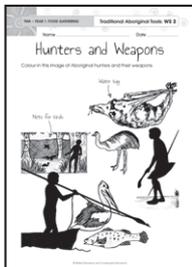
nature included wood from trees, stone, vines from plants, glue from the sticky sap that leaks out of certain trees, and animal bones.

SUPPORTING WORKSHEETS



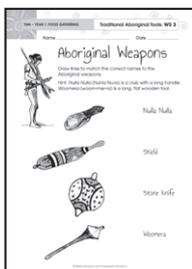
Worksheet 1: Traditional Aboriginal Knives

A drawing activity where students design their own traditional Aboriginal knives.



Worksheet 2: Hunters and Weapons

A colour-in activity where students colour the Aboriginal hunters and their weapons.



Worksheet 3: Aboriginal Weapons

A matching activity where students match the names of the Aboriginal weapons to their pictures.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE



Worksheet 3: Aboriginal Weapons (Answers)

CURRICULUM

| DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGIES | |
|--|---|
| Content description | Elaboration |
| Explore how plants and animals are grown for food, clothing and shelter and how food is selected and prepared for healthy eating (ACTDEK003) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying and categorising a wide range of foods, including Aboriginal bush foods, into food groups and describing tools and equipment needed to prepare these for healthy eating |
| SCIENCE | |
| Content description | Elaboration |
| People use science in their daily lives, including when caring for their environment and living things (ACSHE022) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> considering that technologies used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people require an understanding of how materials can be used to make tools and weapons, musical instruments, clothing, cosmetics and artworks |

KNOWLEDGE AREAS AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Design and Technologies

An explanation of the different Aboriginal tools, how they were used and the natural materials they were made from using the technology of the time (ACTDEK003)

Science

Ancient Australians were masters of utilising every inch of the natural materials in their area. They also established amazing trade routes to access certain natural materials that were necessary, but not available, in their local landscape. Coloured ochre for rock art or shells for spearheads are some examples from living in the desert. (ACSHE022)

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4. Ibid.
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