TEACHING NOTES

Torres Strait Islands Weather Seasons Wheel (Interactive)

Knowledge area: Weather Seasons

Text type: written, interactive, online, multimodal

VISUAL STIMULUS FOCUS

The Torres Strait Islands Weather Seasons Wheel interactive includes animated images, and traditional and landscape setting sounds. It explains how Torres Strait Islander people tell the weather by looking at changes in nature, such as the migration and nesting patterns of birds, wind patterns, and the movement of constellations.

PRIOR TO VIEWING

Introduce the Torres Strait Islands Weather Seasons Wheel interactive to students.

Start the interactive on the website.

To engage your students, ask them to choose the month of the year, and click on it in the interactive.

Background

- Torres Strait Islanders are not mainland Aboriginal people who inhabit the islands of Torres Strait. They are a separate people in origin, history and way of life. From the waters of the Strait, where the Coral and Arafura Seas meet in one of the most fragile and intricate waterways in the world ...¹

- This reef-strewn passage known as Torres Strait, between Cape York at the northeast tip of mainland Australia and the southwest coast of Papua New Guinea, is only a little over 150 kilometres wide but contains over 100 islands, islets, coral reefs and cays.²

- The people throughout the Torres Strait are united by their connection to the [stars of] the Tagai [(Tag-eye)]. The Tagai consists of stories which are the cornerstone of Torres Strait Islanders’ spiritual beliefs. These stories focus on the [origins of these] stars and identify Torres Strait Islanders as sea people who share a common way of life.³

- The movements of Tagai across the sky instruct the world order, predicting new seasons and ensuring everything has a place.⁴

- Torres Strait Islander traditional stories are commonly called legends instead of creation or Dreaming stories. Language was used to identify Island groups, totems, kinships, oral traditions, creation stories, ceremonies and seasons.
The Torres Strait Islands Weather Seasons Wheel is an interactive weather wheel exploring the weather seasons observed by Torres Strait Islander people who live to the north of Queensland on 17 different islands. Click on the different months on the weather wheel to bring up information related to that season.

Reading landscapes, seasons and environments has long been a tradition for Torres Strait Islanders through their close relationships with their islands and seas … The information varies from details on the migration and nesting patterns of key totem birds, to the movement of the Tagai star constellation, to the onset of wind patterns indicating certain planting or fishing cycles.\(^5\)

Understanding the position of Torres Strait Islanders as people of the sea is crucial to understanding Islander values, culture, law and society.\(^6\)

Torres Strait Islander people use indicators in the environment to determine the best time to harvest their food sources.\(^7\)

The knowledge areas of weather seasons of Torres Strait Islanders include:

- Wet and dry seasons, including ‘the doldrums’ [no wind time];
- Wind patterns;
- Bird nesting and migrations patterns;
- Planting and cropping times;
- Other plant life;
- Sea life and fishing movements; and
- Tagai star constellation movements.\(^8\)
December to Early March
North West Season –
(Koki Kerker)

**Signs** — There is total stillness and rainbow-like sunsets.
**Characteristics** — There is maximum plant growth during heavy rains. Night is time for low tides, followed by a change to flood tide in early mornings.
**Activities** — Rainwater is collected in the valves of giant clam shells at the base of trees. People from other islands arrive to trade goods like fish, turtle and dugong. Sweet potato and the seeds of yams are planted.
**Foods** — Vegetable foods are scarce (only bananas and green coconuts). Fishing is very good — trevally, yellow tail, long tom, black bream, gar fish, black fish. Frigate birds and terns are hunted by snares.

March
North West Season –
(Ziel Kerker)

**Signs** — Winds turn around to the south.
**Characteristics** — The weather starts to become cooler.
**Activities** — It is early vegetable harvest time. Preparations are made for the South East season. Wind magic is practised.
**Foods** — Early vegetables may include banana, sweet potato and sugar cane. Fish are plentiful and sardines are harvested with a conical basket made from bamboo.

Early April to Mid-October
South East Season –
(Sager Kerker)

**Signs** — Rainbow fish appear; the kingfisher returns to the area and the planet Venus is the sign of the height of the harvest.
**Characteristics** — Trade winds from the South East make for cooler evenings and the people look to the Wongai tree to tell if there will be a good turtle harvest in the North East season.
**Activities** — The harvest of vegetable food begins. The three staple foods are yams, coconuts and bananas. Local rites and ceremonies with other clan groups begin. House building preparation commences — house grass is collected to use as thatch (which would last up to five years). Tools and weapons are renewed and repaired.
**Foods** — Early vegetables may include banana, sweet potato and sugar cane. Fish are plentiful and sardines are harvested with a conical basket made from bamboo.

Mid-October to Early December
North East Season –
(Naiger Kerker) (1st half of later season)

**Signs** — Usiam (Pleiades) rises in the East. Usiam is part of the star constellation of Tagai, which included the Southern Cross. The first rains come. The wind begins to turn around to the West. Lightning and thunderstorms announce the arrival of the North West season (Koki Kerker).
**Characteristics** — The weather is very hot. Wild yams are sprouting new shoots. Mango and almonds are fruiting, and turtles are laying their eggs on the beaches.
**Activities** — Garden preparation is completed, followed by planting time. Planting of yam tubers and banana suckers happens now. Stone fish traps are made ready for the North West season. Fish hooks are made from turtle shell. Rain-making magic is practised at some villages. Meriam people move to round houses on their families’ lands along the sand beaches for protection against rainy time.
**Foods** — The turtle harvest begins. Turtle eggs are collected and the fish become plentiful. Wild yams, mangoes and almonds are ready to pick. The juice of the green coconut is good to drink.
CRACKERJACK EDUCATION — TEACHING WITH AUNTY

**ACTIVITY 1**

Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show (use Worksheets 1-5)

**STEP 1**
Supply students with copies of Worksheets 1–5 (Shark, Jellyfish and Seahorse, Fish, Dugong, Dinghy). Have them decorate and cut out the templates.

**STEP 2**
Have students glue the templates to sticks. For the Jellyfish template, attach crepe paper to make the jellyfish tentacles.

**STEP 3**
Watch the video *Mua Island Puppet Show from Ghost Net* with students (see the Additional Resources sections) and have them follow along with the story using the puppets they have made.

**AFTER VIEWING DISCUSSION**

- Ask the students how they think Torres Strait Islander people survived living on islands away from Australia’s mainland. *(Answer: Fishing, growing vegetables, hunting birds, travelling by canoe)*

- Explain to the students that Torres Strait Islander people used winds, native animals and plants to know what weather was coming. Discuss how for thousands of years Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people did not have TV, paper and pens, radio or computers, and they had to rely on what was familiar and available to them to find out this information. Have the students imagine what life would be like if they lived on a deserted island and had no TV, computer, books or radio. How would they tell the weather to survive?

- Ask the students how they think Torres Strait Islander people navigated when they were out at sea fishing and hunting. *(Answer: There were no compasses or maps, so they navigated by the stars. Their knowledge of where the different star systems and planets sat at various times of night and day was incredible.)*
Worksheet 1: Shark
A colouring activity where students colour in and decorate the shark. *(The shark template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show’.)*

Worksheet 2: Jellyfish and Seahorse
A colouring activity where students colour in and decorate the jellyfish and seahorse. *(The jellyfish and seahorse templates can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show’.)*

Worksheet 3: Fish
A colouring activity where students colour in and decorate the fish. *(The fish templates can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show’.)*

Worksheet 4: Dugong
A colouring activity where students colour in and decorate the dugong. *(The dugong template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show’.)*

Worksheet 5: Dinghy
A colouring activity where students colour in and decorate the dinghy. *(The dinghy template can be cut out and used for the Shared Viewing Activity ‘Create and Perform Your Own Puppet Show’.)*

Worksheet 6: Seasonal Foods of the Torres Strait Islands
A word search and drawing activity where students circle the seasonal foods in the word search then decorate the border with colourful drawings.
## CURRICULUM

### SCIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content description</th>
<th>Elaboration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science involves making predictions and describing patterns and relationships (ACSHE050)</td>
<td>• researching how knowledge of astronomy has been used by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science knowledge helps people to understand the effect of their actions (ACSHE051)</td>
<td>• researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s knowledge of the local natural environment, such as the characteristics of plants and animals</td>
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### HISTORY

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| The importance of Country/Place to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples who belong to a local area (ACHASSK062) | • liaising with Community to identify original language groups of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples who belong to the local area and exploring the relationship between language, Country/Place and spirituality. (This is intended to be a local area study with a focus on one language group; however, if information or sources are not readily available, another representative area may be studied.)  
• listening to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Elders, grandparents and older community members tell stories associated with the local language groups and the land they belong to |
KNOWLEDGE AREAS AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Science
There were no compasses or maps, so Torres Strait Islander people navigated by the stars when they were out at sea fishing and hunting. Their knowledge of where the different star systems and planets sat at various times of day was incredible. (ACSHE050)

Reading landscapes, seasons and environments has long been a tradition for Torres Strait Islanders through their close relationships with their islands and seas. The information varies from details on the migration and nesting patterns of key totem birds, to the movement of the Tagai star constellation, to the onset of wind patterns indicating certain planting or fishing cycles. (ACSHE051)

History
The Tagai consists of stories which are the cornerstone of Torres Strait Islanders’ spiritual beliefs. These stories focus on the origins of these stars and identify Torres Strait Islanders as sea people who share a common way of life. Language was used to identify Island groups, totems, kinships, oral traditions, creation stories, ceremonies and seasons. (ACHASSK062)

REFERENCES

9. Ibid.