Worksheet: ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

A. Questions to the Text

How many Aborigines are living in Australia today and where do they live?
What does the Aboriginal Australian flag look like?
Can you explain the symbols?
How do Aborigines explain the origin of the world?
Where can you find the earliest Indigenous art forms?
What else do you know about Aboriginal art?
Can you explain the term “native title”?
Why do you think land rights are so essential for Aborigines?
Why is reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people needed?
What social inequalities do Aborigines suffer from?

B. General Questions

1. What do you think was the origin for racial inequalities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia?
2. Do you know other countries where we have the same situation?
3. Australia and Australians of today are proud to be a multicultural country. Why then, do racial differences between black and white Australians still exist?
4. Australia has a long history of immigration. Who is meant by “native Australians”, “white settlers”, “post-war immigrants” and “boat people”?
5. Do you think anybody can immigrate into Australia today?
6. Have you ever thought about leaving Austria to live in another country? If so, where would you like to live?
7. Can you imagine moving to Australia? Why/why not?
8. Would you like to visit Australia for a holiday? What would you like to see?

C. Vocabulary

Check the following words in a dictionary:

- inequality
- behaviour
- cave
- reconciliation
- life expectancy
- immigration
- to apologize
- to make a living off ...
- to tend
- to reject
- remote
- secret
- racial (inequalities)

- law
- beliefs
- the origin
- overcrowding
- disease
- to suffer
- to improve
- to encourage
- to cause
- to attempt
- sacred
- Indigenous
- native
Aboriginal Australia

The black symbolises Aboriginal people and the yellow represents the sun, the constant re-newer of life. Red depicts the earth and peoples’ relationship to the land. It also represents ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.

As of 2001, the Aboriginal population had grown to more than 400,000, and it was expected to rise to 470,000 by 2006. But that's still only 2 percent of the population of all of Australia. And although things are improving, there are still obvious inequalities between the races.

Location

More than half of Australia's Indigenous population lives in either New South Wales or Queensland. But of all the states and territories, the Northern Territory has the highest proportion of Indigenous people, who make up 27.8 per cent of the territory’s population. Nationally, Indigenous people make up 24 per cent of Australians living in rural, remote or very remote areas and just 1 per cent of those living in major cities.

For the Aborigines who live in the major cities of Australia, alcoholism and violence are a way of life. Most Aborigines are very poor and have a very low standard of living. Aboriginal Elders are attempting to change violent behaviour in young men by taking them to one of many sacred sites and teaching them the ancient ways of their people. The educational system, which was once segregated, is now open to Aboriginal children, who are encouraged to attend. However, many Aboriginal children drop out at a young age.

The Aborigines who continue to live in the rural areas of Australia - the outback - have tried to keep as much of their tradition and history alive as they can. Australians have attempted to build houses and other types of shelter for them. But for the most part, Aborigines use these structures only for storage.

Language

Before Europeans arrived in Australia, about 250 diverse Indigenous languages were spoken. Some of these are still spoken today but many have died out.
Spirituality

Most Indigenous belief systems centre on the ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’ to explain life and the origin of the world. In the Dreaming, ancestral beings created features of the land, sea and sky, as well as humans, animals and plants. The Dreaming describes the actions and travels of these beings, some of whom were themselves transformed into features of the landscape, like the Three Sisters rock formation in the Blue Mountains. These beliefs have governed every aspect of Indigenous peoples’ lives and relationships with the land. They are the subject of traditional stories, music and artwork across the continent and the map for their “walkabouts” (spiritual journeys).

Art and Culture

Australian Indigenous art is one of the oldest continuous art traditions in the world. The earliest Indigenous art forms were paintings and engravings on boulders, rock shelters and cave walls, some of which date back 30,000 years.

Their art is now world famous, and many Aborigines make a living off selling their pieces. Traditionally, they view art much like their dreamings: sacred and secret. Only a select few people, after reaching a proper level of knowledge of Aboriginal history, are permitted to see the artwork. In recent years, though, that’s changed, so some artists can make money to support themselves and their families.

Aboriginal art comes in different forms: paintings, beadwork, woodwork, bark paintings and baskets. Aborigines also make and sell the most famous item to come out of Australia: the boomerang. But some art can’t be sold -- it’s on the walls of caves. A famous Australian landmark, Ayers Rock, is one such place. The rock covers a series of caves. Within those caves are walls and walls of paintings done by the Aborigines to illustrate their dreamings. While people visit Ayers Rock and see the paintings, there’s still no way to know what they mean. And the Aborigines, for the time being, are keeping it a secret.

Indigenous Australians also have a rich musical tradition and celebrate the journeys of their ancestors in song and dance. Traditional Indigenous music was predominantly vocal but musical instruments like didgeridoos were used as accompaniments.

Land Rights

The expression ‘native title’ is used in Australian law to describe the communal, group or individual rights and interests that Aboriginal peoples or Torres Strait Islanders hold in land or waters according to their traditional laws and customs.

In a decision of the High Court of Australia in 1992, Eddie Mabo was the first Indigenous person to have native title rights recognised on behalf of the Meriam people. The court rejected the idea that Australia had been terra nullius—land belonging to no one—at the time of British settlement.
Issues today


Stolen generation: From 1910 until 1970, between 10 and 30 per cent of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families under state and federal child welfare and protection laws. The Australian Government now recognises that the separation of Indigenous children from their families caused profound suffering and loss on many Indigenous Australians. On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd formally apologised to Indigenous Australians for the removal of children from their families and communities and promised to improve Indigenous education, health and housing.

Education, health and housing: Indigenous Australians experience significant socioeconomic disadvantage compared with non-Indigenous Australians. Educationally, fewer Indigenous students attend and finish school than non-Indigenous students. In 2005, the proportion of Indigenous students who completed their secondary education was 49 per cent, compared with 87 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

From 1996 to 2001, life expectancy at birth was estimated to be 59 years for Indigenous men and 65 years for Indigenous women, whereas in the general population in 1998-2000 it was 77 years for men and 82 years for women. In 2004-05, 65 per cent of Indigenous people had at least one long term health condition and Indigenous people were more than 10 times as likely as non-Indigenous people to have kidney disease, and three times as likely to have diabetes.

Indigenous people tend to experience lower housing standards than other Australians, especially in remote communities. Overcrowding is a particular problem and is associated with poor health conditions.