

BANGARRA DANCE THEATRE



WARU

Journey of the Small Turtle

Learning Pack

For educators, parents, guardians

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Bangarra Dance Theatre pays respect and acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, create and perform. We also wish to acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose customs and cultures inspire our work.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (ICIP)

Bangarra acknowledges the industry standards and protocols set by the Australia Council for the Arts: Protocols for working with Indigenous Artists (2007). These protocols have been widely adopted in the Australian arts to respect ICIP and to develop practices and processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultural heritage. Bangarra incorporates ICIP into the very heart of our projects, from storytelling to dance, to set design, language and music.

CULTURAL CONSULTANCY

In creating and sharing *Waru - journey of the small turtle* with audiences, we acknowledge the generous contributions and support from Leonara Adidi (Language and Cultural Consultant).

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Last updated July 2023

WARU

Journey of the Small Turtle

Introduction

As audience members experiencing *Waru - journey of the small turtle*, you are participants in a storytelling experience. The themes within the story are all drawn from the culture and lived experience of people of the Torres Strait – how they care for land, sea and creatures, how they respect the knowledge handed down by ancestors, and how they keep their culture strong.

We recognise that as young children become more conscious of the wider world around them, they are full of curiosity about their place within it. We hope that the experience of our production *Waru - journey of the small turtle* will inspire a sense of connection to Country, and an awareness of the many Cultures and People who make up this part of the world we call Australia.

This learning resource provides information about the Torres Strait and the uniqueness of its geographical location, languages, environmental and cultural practices. We hope this information will support teachers, parents and guardians in building their students/ children's awareness of the Torres Strait and all it has to offer as well as some of the challenges it faces in terms of climate change and sea pollution.

Waru - journey of the small turtle has been generously supported by the Girgensohn Foundation, the Knights Family Jabula Foundation and the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government initiative.

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Story

WARU - JOURNEY OF THE SMALL TURTLE

As a contemporary Torres Strait story, *Waru* is an opportunity for children to learn about the wonders of the natural world and what it can teach us through the eyes of one little turtle as she undertakes her journey of discovery and survival.

Waru - journey of the small turtle is a contemporary saltwater Lagaw Kazil (Island Children) story inspired by the green turtle's significance in the Torres Strait Islander totemic system.

Migi, the little green turtle, will face many challenges during her lifetime. From the moment she hatches from the egg and races over the sand to the ocean, to her return to the same beach as an adult turtle to lay her own eggs, Migi will have many struggles. She will battle the silent but very dangerous ghost nets and engage with hunters and predators of the natural world.

The green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) is an endangered species, whose rookeries populate several of the islands in the Torres Strait. This turtle species has a small head and strong front flippers to help them glide through the water. They swim beneath the surface and come up to breathe about every half hour.

Like many island environments, the Torres Strait is under serious threat from climate change. Rising sea levels are eroding the lands, including sacred cultural sites, and increased sea temperatures, ocean acidification and human rubbish are impacting the health of all marine life - including turtles. Increased sea temperatures also impact the turtles' ability to navigate the correct migration routes back to their island homes.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

As children experience the production of *Waru*, they are taking part in a creative and compelling form of storytelling that contextualises the uniqueness of the Torres Strait Islands and presents it in a way that children can relate to and comprehend.

As the story comes to life, and children interact with the characters, they are absorbing information about some of the most important issues that face the world. For example:

- Learning about other Cultures as a first step in developing an understanding of the human right to be able to express one's culture and participate in cultural life with dignity and equity.
- Learning about the threat to our natural world. The human action that disrupts the balance required for our planet's sustainability, and why this is critical as the world faces so many environmental challenges.
- Learning about the places where languages and traditions are distinctive to the people of that place, and how those people's lifestyles are governed by deep knowledge of land, seas and weather cycles.

THE CREATION OF WARU

Bangarra's *Waru* is an interactive and immersive experience. Lights, projection, and sound will evoke the colours, music and rhythms of nature, transforming the stage into the environment of the Torres Strait Islands, opening up a fluid and creative space for imagination and play.

Language and Cultural Consultant Leonara Adidi has written new songs in Kala Kawaw Ya language, and created traditionally inspired contemporary sit-down dances - drawn in part from Bangarra's 2001 work *Turtle (Corroboree)*. The audience (young, old and in-between) will have the chance to participate in Torres Strait Islander cultural practices firsthand.

Co-created by Stephen Page (Director), Hunter Page-Lochard (Writer), together with Bangarra alumni Dancers and Choreographers Sani Townson and Elma Kris, *Waru - journey of the small turtle* is a work about hope over adversity. It will call to the next generation, and empower them with the knowledge that they can make a positive difference in the world. Providing teachers, parents and guardians with a unique opportunity to open up conversations about climate change, it will also speak to the pivotal role that the traditional cultural values of respect and reciprocity play in caring for Country and living in harmony with our environment.

Place



Where do you live on this map?

WHERE ARE THE TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS?

The Torres Strait Islands – *Zenadh-Kes (Kala Lagaw Ya – four directional winds)* lie in a beautiful stretch of water between the land at the very top of the Australian continent and the southernmost part of Papua New Guinea. There are 274 islands in the Torres Strait. Most of these islands are very small. Only about 18 of the islands have people living on them.

WHAT IS THE WEATHER LIKE IN THE TORRES STRAIT?

The Torres Strait is located in a tropical zone and has a wet (monsoon) season from December to April, and a dry season from May to November. Temperatures and humidity can be very high.

Today, low lying islands of the Torres Strait are extremely threatened by the effects of climate change. As our planet gets warmer, sea levels are rising and impacting the lives and livelihoods of the people. As the sea temperatures increase, the reefs start to deteriorate. These reefs are home to the fish that provide the Islanders with food. When the reef breaks down the fish are not there, so the people lose an important food source.

The authorities who are responsible for those who live in the Torres Strait are having to think about how they can help these communities adapt to climate change. For example, on the shores of Saibai, a large sea wall is being built to protect houses, schools and businesses, many buildings are installing solar power to help reduce carbon emissions, and a heat mapping project will monitor communities to prepare for heat stress.

Place

WHAT KINDS OF CREATURES LIVE IN THE TORRES STRAIT?

The Torres Strait is home to many amazing creatures – stingrays, sharks, crayfish, dugongs, eels, and many types of fish and migrating birds. Six of the seven species of sea turtles in the world are found in the Torres Strait. Turtles are totems for many Islander people (as well as a source of food). Stories about turtles are a way of passing cultural information about the land and the sea from one generation to the next.

All the creatures in the Torres Strait are special, and some of them are among the oldest species on the planet. So, it is important to look after the environment they inhabit, or they will simply not survive. *Waru* is the story of one of these types of turtles – the green turtle.



Fun facts about green turtles

- 1 Green turtles are not actually green to look at until they are quite old and are mostly eating just sea grasses. The 'green' refers to the green layer of fat under their shell.
- 2 Using their flippers, turtles can swim very fast if they have to, and can hold their breath for up to nine hours underwater.
- 3 Turtles navigate their way around the sea and back to the place they were born by knowing where the sun is, feeling the temperature of the water, and using the earth's magnetic field. They are excellent navigators.
- 4 Female turtles lay about 100 eggs each time they make a nest.
- 5 Turtles have been on the planet for about 120 million years and can live to be 100 years old.

Place

GHOST NETS: SILENT DANGER

One of the most dangerous threats to sea creatures in the Torres Strait, including turtles, is the large amount of abandoned fishing gear that floats around the oceans. The material entangles these creatures so that they can't swim or catch food for themselves.

It is reported that there are currently about 700,000 tons of tangled fishing nets, lines and traps floating around the ocean.

For many commercial fishers it is easier to simply cut damaged nets loose and leave them to float away, rather than bring them back to shore to repair. These abandoned nets are called *Ghost Nets*. They are like silent death traps to animals who live in the sea. Animals swim into these nets and become tangled and entrapped. Their fins become damaged, then they starve to death because they cannot catch food.

Ghost Net Art

About twenty years ago, Australian Indigenous artists in communities directly affected by ghost nets found a way to raise awareness about this devastating issue while recycling the rubbish that was washing up on their beaches. They started to create beautiful works of art - art that honours the beauty of sea creatures whose spirits are sacred to the local Islander communities. Ghost net art is a way to tell people about what is happening to our unique wildlife when people do not look after the environment.



Place

THE FOUR WINDS OF THE TORRES STRAIT AND THEIR IMPORTANCE.

In most parts of the world, people describe weather seasons as Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, and there are specific dates in the calendar telling us when each season starts and ends. In the Torres Strait, the seasons are recognised by four very different and particular winds.

Life in the Torres Strait is dependent on knowing about these four winds. They tell you what to expect and how to prepare for what is coming.

Zey

(pronounced Zay)

is a cool breeze and is also called the 'south wind'. Zey is gentle, calm and relaxing. Time for people to rest and prepare for the next wind - Kuki.



Naygay

(pronounced NyeGye)

is the calmest, most gentle wind and is also known as the 'north wind'. On a fine day the sea glistens as Naygay floats across the water. You can hear the birds sing and the people chatting amongst themselves as they prepare to go fishing for turtle and dugong.



Kuki

(pronounced Cook-ie)

brings tropical storms and rough seas from the northwest. Kuki is an aggressive wind - dark and threatening. During this time people do not go out in their boats. Yet people also welcome this wind because it brings heavy rainfall to cleanse and replenish the rivers with clean water.



Sager

(pronounced Sah-gair)

is the gusty wind that comes from the southeast. This signals the time to go hunting or pearl diving. This wind carries the boats out to sea for people to fish and to visit other islands.



People

ISLANDERS / ISLAND LIFE LANGUAGES

The people of the Torres Strait are called 'Islanders'. Their lives are quite different to people who live on the mainland of Australia's coastal or inland areas, and very different to people who live in cities or towns. Travelling to school, to work, and to see family and friends is mostly done by boat. There is one central airport on Horn Island. From there, Torres Strait Air flies to smaller islands such as Saibai, Erub, Mer and Baddhu, as well as remote places on the Cape York Peninsula and Papua New Guinea.

The sea is, of course, one of the main sources of food for Islanders - fish and shellfish are plentiful, and turtle is cooked and eaten regularly. People also collect and eat seagull eggs, gather seeds and berries, and there are a number of ground crops like yams and cassava. People don't have set times to catch, hunt or gather food - they listen to and watch the winds, they look to the stars, and pay attention to animal breeding seasons, to know when they can find food at any given time.

Every person in the Torres Strait is given a totem animal. It is forbidden to eat your totem animal unless for special ceremony.

There are three languages in the Torres Strait, and for each of these languages there are several dialects. For thousands of years these languages were not written down, so it is important that people in the Torres Strait continue to speak their own languages. Being able to speak your language is empowering - it underpins a sense of identity, a sense of belonging and a sense of pride.

Language is also the platform for cultural practices, lore, knowledge transmission, and ceremony to take place. Losing a language is a great tragedy. Today, endangered languages are being identified all over the world, and language revival has become more proactive.

The three main languages of the Torres Strait are:

Yumplatok

also known as Torres Strait Creole, is spoken in the Torres Strait and in some parts of Cape York Peninsula. Yumplatok is a fusion of English words and traditional language words. It's a complex language and is always evolving.

Meriam Mir

is spoken throughout the eastern islands of Erub (Darnley Island), Ugar (Stephen Island) and Mer (Murray Island).

Kala Lagaw Ya

is spoken on the western islands of Mabuyag and Baddhu as well as Thursday Island. Kalaw Kawaw Ya a dialect spoken on the western islands. Below are some words heard in production *Waru - the journey of the small turtle*.

HERE ARE SOME KALAW KAWAW YA WORDS TO TRY OUT

guidance for pronouncing the vowels u, a, e.
U - oo as in pool
A - uh as in hut
O - or as in for

Ama	Mum	uh-muh
Bab	Dad	bub
Yawo	Goodbye	ya-war
Eso	Thank you	e-sore
Kapu Kubil	Good night	kar-poo koo-bill
Kapu Bathaynga	Good morning	kar-poo ba-thigh-ng-uh
Kuyk	head	k-oo-y-k
Zu	shoulders	Z-oo
Kulu	knees	koo-loo
San	toes	saan
Puurka	eyes	poourr-jah
Kawra	ears	cowrah
Gud	mouth	good
Piti	nose	pitee

People

THE FLAG OF THE TORRES STRAIT

The Torres Strait flag is an official flag of Australia along with the Aboriginal flag and the Commonwealth of Australia flag.

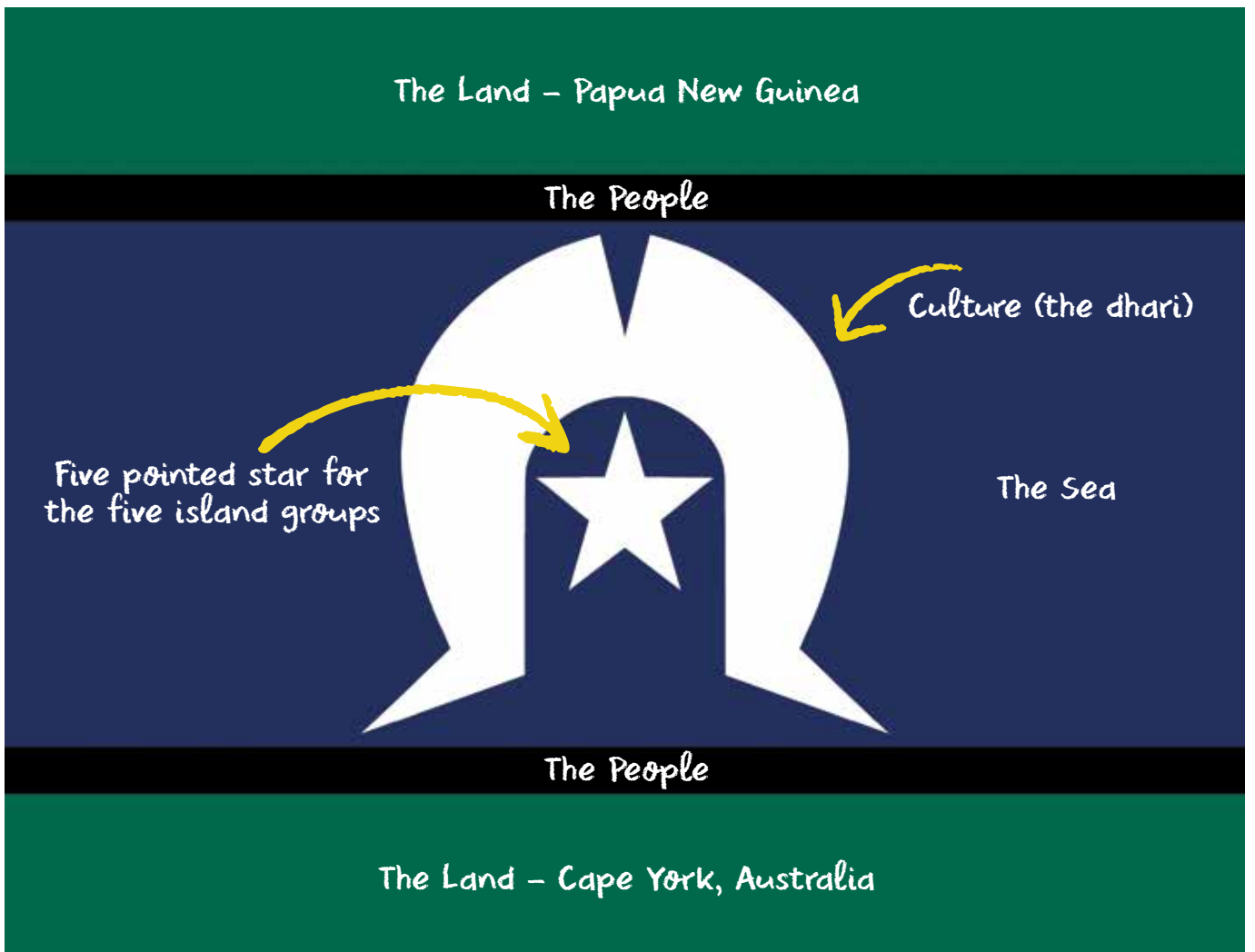
The green panels at the top and bottom of the flag represent the land. The central blue panel represents the sea. The black lines dividing the panels represent the Torres Strait Islander people. The centre of the flag shows a white *dhari* (thari) which represents Torres Strait Islander culture.

Underneath the *dhari*, or dancers' headdress, is a white five-pointed star. The star is an important symbol for navigating the sea. The points of the star represent the five island groups in the Torres Strait and the colour white symbolises peace.

Each part of the flag gives meaning to Torres Strait Islander culture and also signifies legal and political status worldwide.



The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namuk of Thursday Island in 1992.



Culture



SPIRITUALITY - THE TAGAI

Torres Strait Islanders are united by their connection to the Taigai. The Tagai are stories that have guided the people of the Torres Strait for thousands of years, about how to live a good life, how to be part of a strong community and be good to each other. Tagai stories focus on the stars and identify Torres Strait Islanders as sea people.

CONNECTION

For Islanders, the land and the sea are the same - they are one environment, one place, and connection to that place is the foundation for their identity. A place where sea life - turtles, fish, dugongs, seabirds, and crocodiles - are totemic beings as well as food. A place where the land provides shelter and food, and holds the stories of ancestors.

CHRISTIANITY

When Christian missionaries arrived in the Torres Strait in 1871, the traditional cultural ways were threatened as this new belief system spread amongst the Community. However much of the teaching of the missionaries was actually quite compatible with the Tagai stories, and the missionaries were also committed to protecting the Islanders from exploitation by the maritime industry.

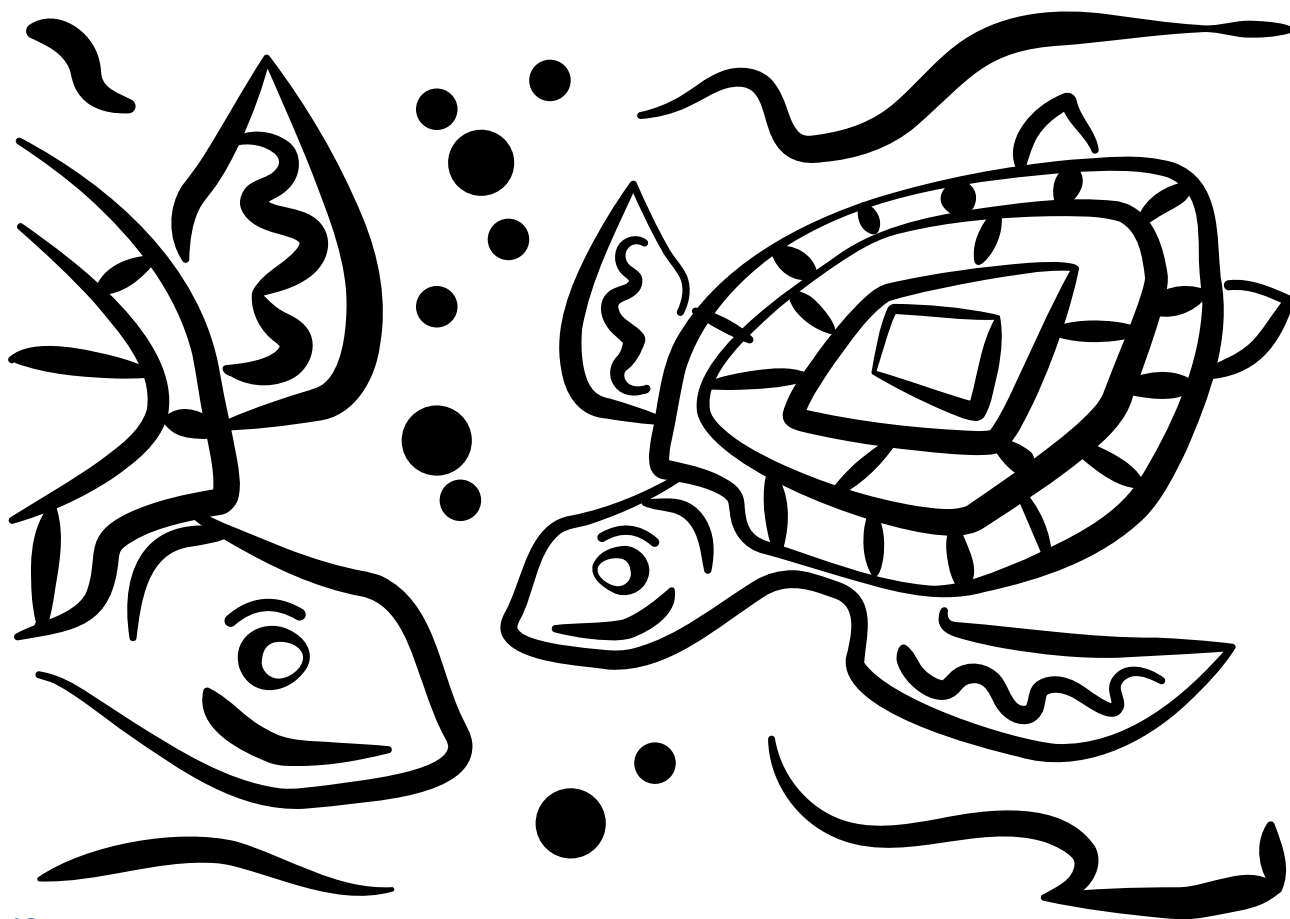
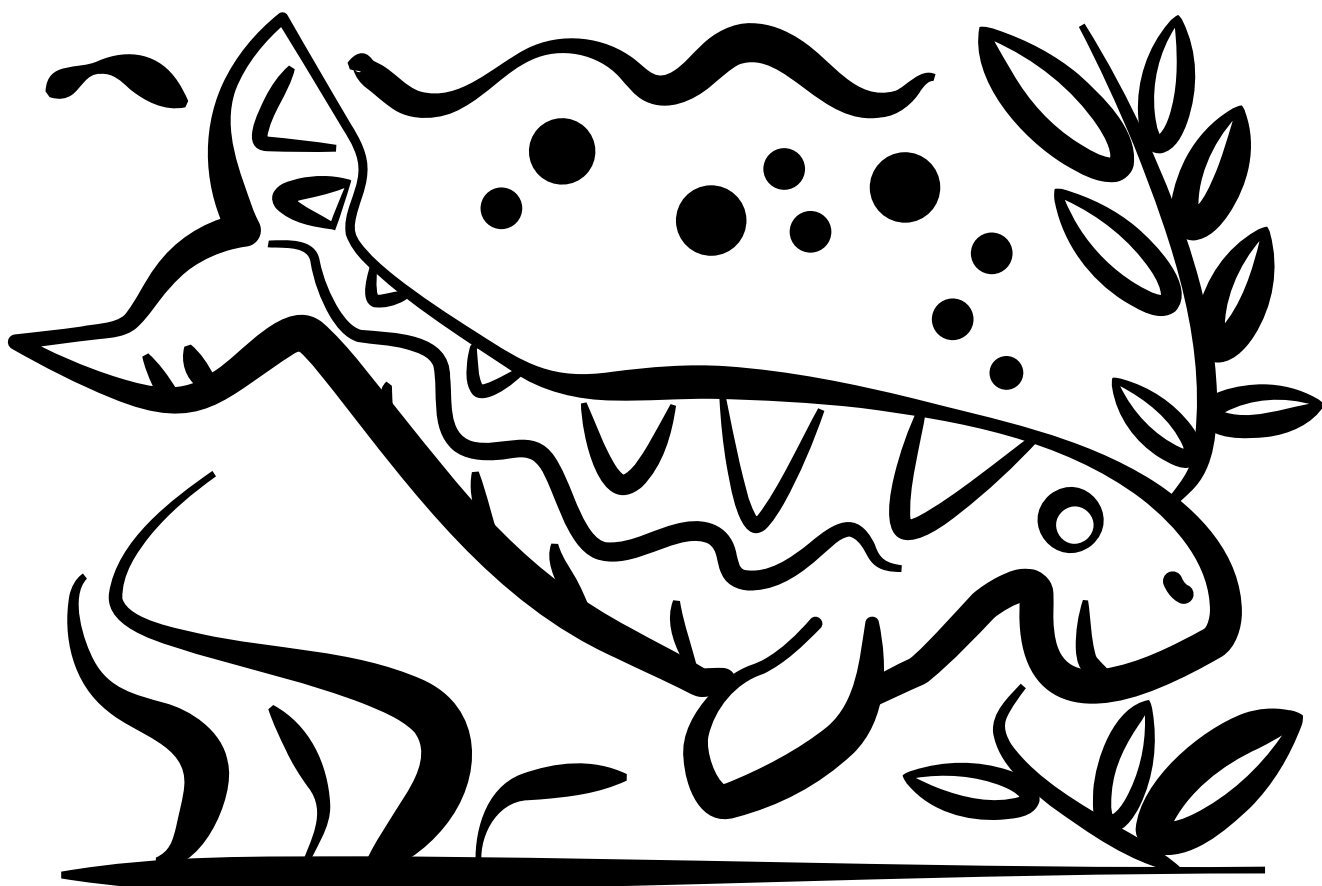
Today, Christianity remains strong in Torres Strait Islander communities. The coming of the missionaries is acknowledged every year on the first day of July with the Coming of the Light celebrations. On this day, there is always a reenactment of the arrival of the first missionaries, performed by Islanders, as well as feasting, singing and dancing.

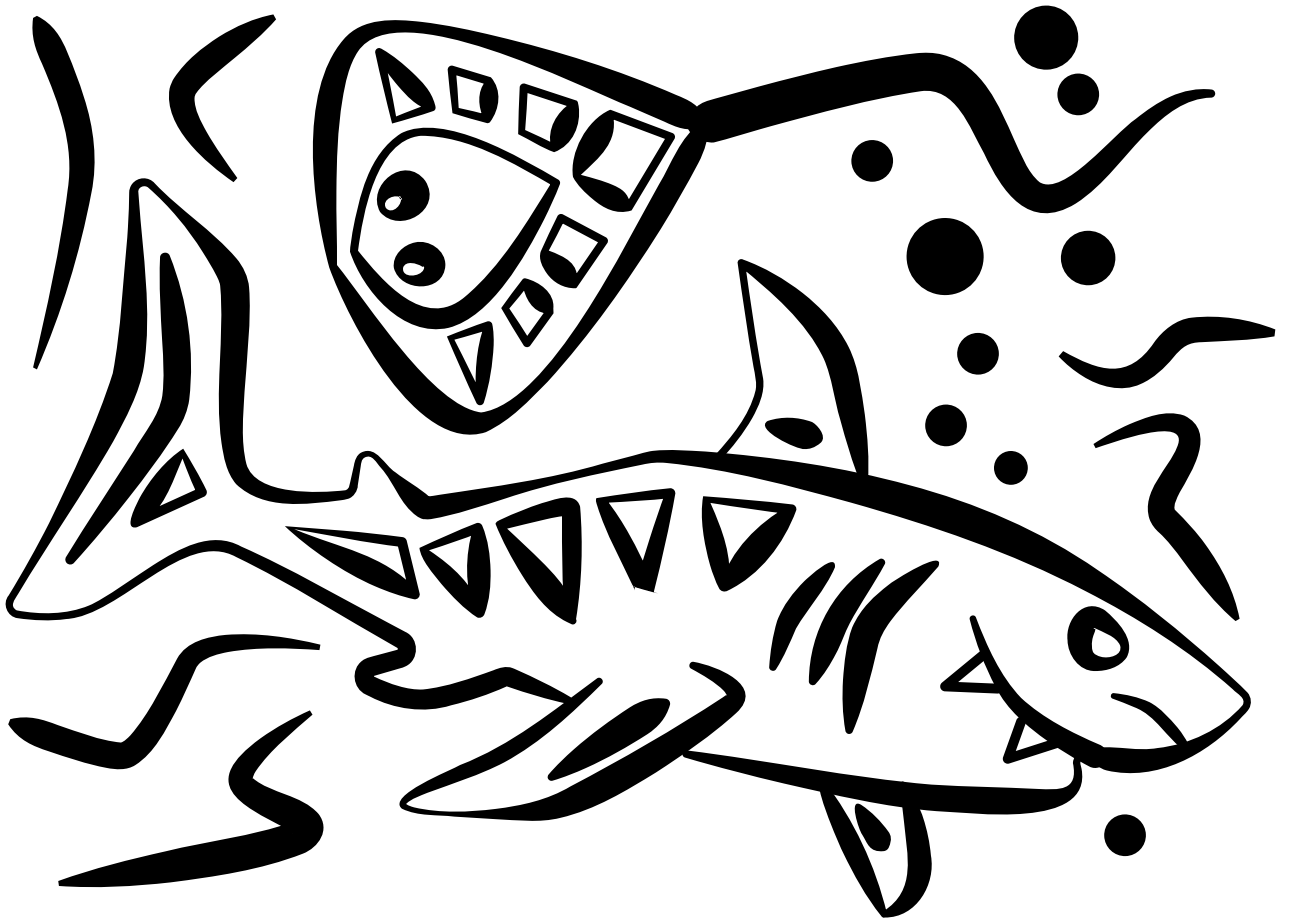
MUSIC, SONG AND DANCE

The unique music, songs and dances of the Torres Strait are a way to maintain story and lore, and pass them on from one generation to the next. There are sacred songs, Kab Kar, that are protected by special custodians and only performed under strict circumstances. Meanwhile, new songs are being invented all the time, to tell stories of the past, the present and the future.

Traditional musical instruments include Kulaps (seed pod rattle), Warup (hourglass shape drum made of wood and lizard skin), clapsticks, and whistles.

Colouring activities





FOR EDUCATORS - CURRICULUM RELEVANCE

EARLY LEARNING

Fundamental to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia, is the view that children's lives are characterised by the concepts of belonging, being and becoming.

From before birth, children are connected to family, community, culture, and place. Their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children's first and most influential educators. As children participate in everyday life, they develop interests and construct their own identities and understandings of the world.

Below are aspects of the EYLF learning outcomes relevant to Bangarra's production of *Waru* - *journey of the small turtle*.

Learning outcome 1:

CHILDREN HAVE A STRONG SENSE OF IDENTITY through

- Culture, strength, autonomy, confidence, empathy, respect.
- Intercultural understanding for the future.
- Resilience and a sense of agency.

Learning outcome 2:

CHILDREN ARE CONNECTED WITH AND CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR WORLD by having

- A sense of belonging, reciprocity within the community, respect for diversity, respect for the environment that supports us.

Learning outcome 4:

CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS through

- Creativity, imagination, enquiry, adaptation, self-learning through connection with people, place and materials.

PRIMARY SCHOOL FOUNDATION TO YEAR 2 (AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM)

In Primary school education, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures is a priority across the curriculum. This provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students the ability to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the curriculum; and allows all students to engage in reconciliation, respect, and recognition of the world's oldest continuing living culture.

Foundation students, typically aged between ages 4 and 6 years, develop understanding about continuity and change, perspectives empathy and significance. Stage 1 (Years 1 and 2) (typically aged between 6 and 7 years) develop an understanding for place, space, environment, and change.

As teachers implement the curriculum, a range of texts are offered to young students including oral narrative traditions as well as the contemporary stories of Australia's First Nations Peoples. The concept of there being diversity in the community and many different languages used in communication across communities is introduced and explored. Children learn about different environments and how we need to protect these for the safety and well being of all who live on our planet.

Across the Curriculum:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

General capabilities:

Critical and Creative thinking; Intercultural understanding; Personal and social capability.

BOOKS & ONLINE

BOOKS

How the turtle got his shell, J.V. Marshall (author), Francis Firebrace (illustrator), Walker Books Australia, 2015.

123 Turtles and Geckos: a Counting Book for Kids, Nyapanyapa Yunupingu, Siena Mayutu wurmarra Stubbs, National Gallery of Victoria 2021.

ONLINE

[Language of the Torres Strait - Kala Yagaw La](#)

Elma Kris introduces her language and teaches some words.

[Green turtle conservation status](#)

More information about the green turtle breeding and nesting areas, their diet, and the vulnerability of their species.

[Turtle Future, ABC Education](#)

Hear about the threats to turtle species and the things that are being done to ensure their future.

[About the Torres Strait](#)

See how life for kids in the Torres Strait is pretty special.

[Torres Strait Regional Authority](#)

<https://www.tsra.gov.au/the-torres-strait>

[Torres Strait Regional Authority - interactive map](#)

<https://lsmu.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=1a5682cb4a0949dda2e65a290de3327a>

[Gabtitui Cultural Centre](#)

<https://www.gabtitui.gov.au/torres-strait>

[Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies](#)

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Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, 2009. Australian Children's Education & Care quality Authority ACECQA

Australian Curriculum - ACARA




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