

# WURUNDJERI CULTURE RESOURCE KIT



William Barak: Ceremony. Courtesy State Library of Victoria and Wurundjeri Elders.

*Produced by Nillumbik Reconciliation Group Inc*

## **FOREWORD**

### **To the Wurundjeri Culture Resource Kit By Auntie Dot Peters**

As an Elder of my community, I know there is a great need for awareness and understanding. Education is most important for our young – they are the future of this country.

The Wurundjeri Culture Resource Kit is an excellent way for our young Aboriginal children to learn more about their culture, and for children of other cultures to become aware of ancient Australian culture.

With learning comes understanding, with understanding comes caring and a more fulfilling life for all.

*Dot Peters  
Yarra Yarra Elder*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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The kit was first developed as a central component of the inaugural William Barak Short Story Competition held in the year 2000, and has been updated each year since. The competition was open to all Grade 5 & 6 students attending primary schools within Nillumbik Shire. Following the award night, five of the competition's winning stories were published under the title, *Imagining Our History*.

The central focus of the kit is the culture of the Wurundjeri of the Yarra Valley. Its aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the richness and scope of their way of life among present day young people, their parents and teachers. Suggestions as to how the kit might be further developed in future years would be welcome!

We recognise the particular contributions of Nillumbik Reconciliation Group members: Mick Woiwod for his invaluable research; Elisabeth Bromley for her writing of the text and preparing the kit for printing; Robbie Greig for his efforts in securing photographs and providing support material; Carol Leeson for her counsel and liaison work; Gaille Abud for her willingness in taking on many helpful and necessary tasks; and Maitreyi Ray for her participation in preparing and illustrating the Wurundjeri Board Game and supplementary activities, and for providing teacher education in the usage of this kit.

Special thanks to Glen Jamison and Jock Macneish for permission to include detail from the 'Timelines of the Middle Yarra Project'. Full information concerning the project can be found in *The Middle Yarra Timelines Calendar* produced as a joint venture by the Shires of Manningham and Nillumbik.

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## INTRODUCTION

Pretend as you go through this kit, that a Wurundjeri family living here more than 200 years ago is telling you about themselves, giving you a chance to enter their world. Words that may need more explanation are in **bold**, and ***Woiworung*** words are in bold and italics. There is a glossary at the end of the kit to explain and translate these words, as well as some other helpful resources. (As an aid to teachers, CSF Outcomes are listed at the end of each section.)

## WE ARE THE WURUNDJERI

Our people are called the Wurundjeri, and the language we speak is called ***Woiworung***. The Yarra Valley has been our home for more than 40,000 years! But we don't study our history with time-lines and dates. We learn our ancestors' stories of how the world came into being, and what our place in it is. We learn about the sacred places on the earth, and how the great Creative Beings of the Dreamtime still speak to us through birds and animals. Because our people have lived here for so long, we know all the plants and animals that live here with us, and understand their ways. We know how to feed ourselves and clothe ourselves and build our homes from the land around us. Our parents and relatives teach us these things from the time that we are young – this is our school. School for us is part of our life, under the sun and clouds and rain, as we learn what we need to know to live well on the land. We will tell you a little bit about the way we live, so you can imagine what it would be like to live as one of us.



Using a bark canoe on Badger Creek, Coranderrk, Victoria. C. 1889. Acquired from F. Shaw, photograph F. Kruger. Courtesy Museum Victoria.

## THE KULIN NATION



Tommy McRae : Out Hunting For Dinner – A Run Of Luck : Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria Picture Collection

The **Wurundjeri** people are one of many hundreds of groups of people who live on this continent. Each of us have our own stories and knowledge, our own laws and rules about how to behave. We have our own languages, and our own regions where we live.

There are seven clans that make up the Wurundjeri, and we speak a language called **Woiworung**. There is a list of **Woiworung** words and names in the section with HELPFUL RESOURCES, so you can imagine speaking our language. Woiworung country is the entire Yarra Valley from the headwaters of the Yarra River and all of its tributaries down to the Maribyrnong River and Kooyong-koot Creek. The main clan north of the Yarra River is the Wurundjeri-willam. Our people are part of the **Kulin Nation**. There are four other groups of people in the Kulin Nation, and each speaks a different language. They are the **Bunurong** near Port Phillip and Western Port Bays; the **Wathaurung** around Geelong as far north as Ballarat; the **Kurrung** from Port Phillip Bay inland to Bacchus Marsh; and the **Taungurong** around the Upper Goulburn. Look at the map on the next page! (You could think of the Kulin Nation as being a bit like the European Union, an alliance of friendly nations each speaking a different language.)

At certain times of year, many clans from the Kulin Nation gather together. Of course it must be a time and place when food is very plentiful! And the clan who lives in the region must send out an invitation to all the other people. These are important occasions for settling any problems that have come up between different clans or groups. They are also very important times for meeting and arranging marriage partners! The way in which men and women are related must be thought about very carefully when it comes time to marry. The people who live in one clan are too closely related, so wives must come from a different language group. Because our young people marry outside of the clan, young men and women usually meet each other at ceremonies and festivals where many clans get together.



Wurundjeri women, Melbourne. c. 1858-1859 (Detail). Acquired Museum Mankind, photograph A.J. Fauchery. Courtesy Museum Victoria

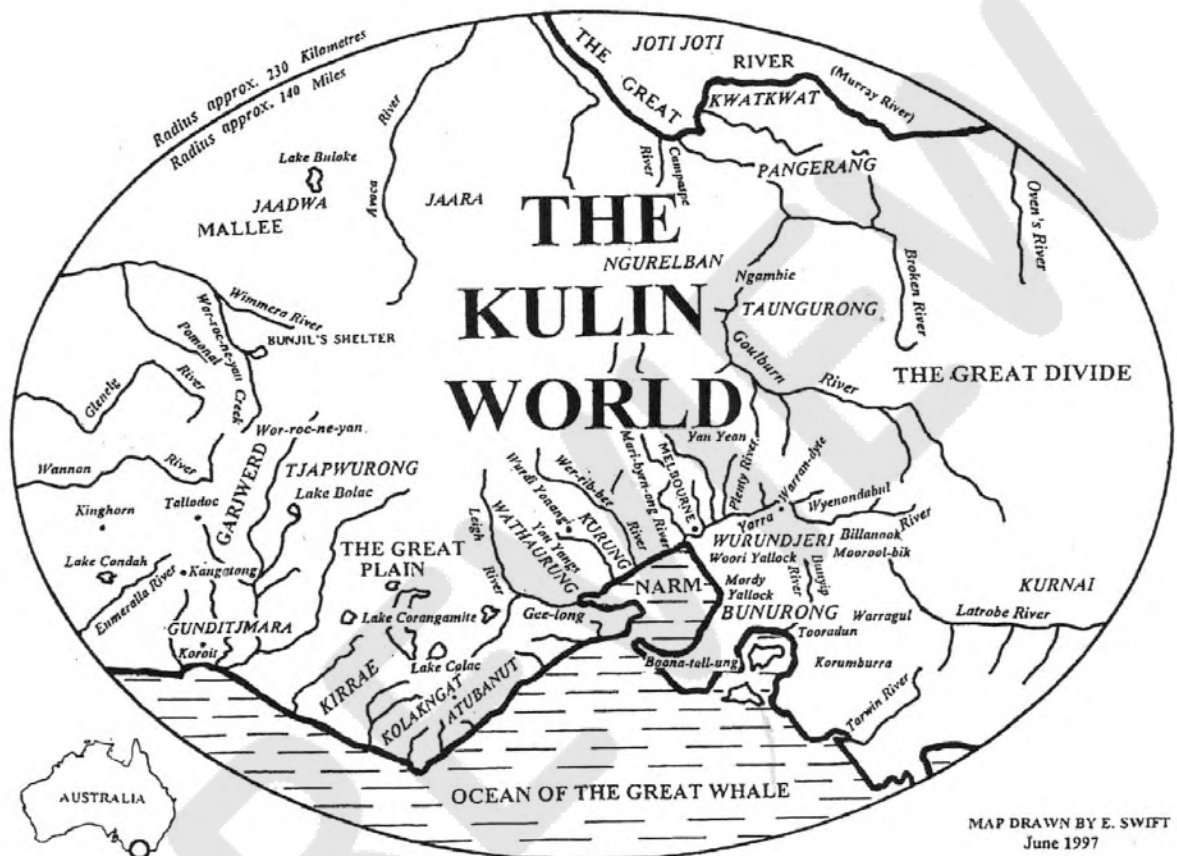
**QUESTION: When European settlers came, the Wurundjeri people found it much easier to learn English than the settlers found it to learn Woiworung. Why was it natural for a Wurundjeri person to be multi-lingual (know more than one language)?**

CSF II Outcomes: ENGLISH:\*Reading; SOSE:\*History \*Geography; MATHEMATICS:\*Measurement \*Time  
\*Location



## ACTIVITY SHEET - THE KULIN NATION

Make a large photocopy of the map below. Imagine that you are part of a Wurundjeri clan, attending a great gathering of the Kulin Nation on the shores of Narm. Colour the map in, and decorate it with pictures of the feasting, dancing, and games (such as the football game called **marn-grook**) that you and your friends would be part of. You could take the style of William Barak (cover) or Tommy McRae (pages 5, 14 & 31) as your inspiration.



Map drawn by E. Swift, 1997.



## OUR PLACE IN THIS WORLD: THE DREAMING

From the time we are small, we hear stories about the Dreamtime, when our great Creative Ancestors roamed the earth. They were human, animal and bird all at the same time, and they created the rivers and hills and stars in the sky. All the people, and plants and animals come from these great powers, and we are still part of them. We each have a totem animal, an animal that we have a special kinship with, because we are still part of the Creative Power who brings that bird or animal into being. We never harm it. If we see our totem animal, or hear it call out, we pay attention.

We pay attention to all the creatures, because they are still one with the Creative Beings who first walked the earth, just as we are. We know they often give us signs about what is happening and what we should do. Our name for 'crow' is **waa** or **waang** and if a crow comes overhead and cries, 'Waa! Waa! Waa!' we know our enemies are somewhere near. If he calls out overhead like this, and flies away still crying out, 'Waa!' then we run after him to escape! *(As told by William Barak.)*

Wurundjeri people believe that **Bunjil**, the Eaglehawk (or Wedge-tailed Eagle) Ancestor, is greatest of all the Creative Beings. He made the land of the Wurundjeri, and of all our neighbouring peoples – the great Kulin Nation. Then he flew into the heavens to become the Eagle Star (which Europeans call 'Altair'). Here on earth he is still with us in the form of the Eaglehawk.

We have stories about most of the places around us – rivers and hills and special rocks – and how they were created. **Mo-Yarra** and other Ancestors created the Yarra by carving its course with their stone axes. **Waa**, the Crow, first brought fire to the land. And another Creative Being created Port Phillip when he accidentally spilt a magic **tarnuk**, or wooden bucket. The Ancestors who created these places are still present in them; all the earth is alive with Creative Powers.



William Barak: Dancing Scene with Wallaby and Emu. Courtesy State Library of Victoria and Wurundjeri Elders

Some places are very sacred. **Murrup Brarn** is a sacred place (near Yarra Glen). The lagoon on the Yarra near Bulleen is sacred, and so are the bird rocks of Clematis. The hill in Kangaroo Ground (where your war memorial stands) is a sacred place. Some sacred places belong to the women; others to the men. Children must never enter a sacred place, and strangers mustn't either – they don't have the secret knowledge needed to go to these places. If they do, the **Mindie**, a huge and terrible snake that lives near Wedderburn, will stretch its body out over hills and rivers – as far as it needs to – and strike them dead!

The Dreamtime isn't ancient history. It's always here and now. We all come out of the power of the Dreaming, and are still part of it. Our ceremonies and songs and the way we live ensure the survival of the Dreaming, and honour the Creative Ancestors. When we die, we return to our source, which we have never left. We return to the Dreaming.

Imagine now, that you are sitting with us, on a lazy afternoon beside the Yarra, listening to the story of the **Karatgurk** women, and how the Creative Ancestors formed the sacred rocks of Clematis.

#### THE KARATGURK WOMEN, AND THE ROCKS OF CLEMATIS

There were five young women called the **Karatgurk** who lived on the Yarra Flats. They dug up yams with their digging sticks. At the end of their digging sticks, they carried live coals for fire. **Waang** the crow decided to steal their fire to cook his own yams. He hid some snakes in an ants' nest, and then offered the ants' eggs to the **Karatgurk**.

When the women started to eat the eggs, they disturbed the snakes. The snakes attacked the **Karatgurk**, who struck at them with their sticks and dropped some coals. **Waang** seized the coals and flew high up a tree. Great **Bunjil** the Eaglehawk asked **Waang** for fire to cook a possum, but **Waang** offered to cook the possum for him instead. The **Kulin** people gathered and demanded fire from **Waang**. **Waang** panicked and flung the fire to the crowd. **Korok-goru** the fire-tailed finch hid some behind his back!

**Bunjil's** young men seized the fire and set fire to **Waang's** country. **Waang** was burnt black! The fire spread so fast, **Bunjil** placed rocks at the head of the Yarra to stop it spreading. The **Karatgurk** were swept away to the sky where they are the stars called the Pleiades. They still carry fire on their digging sticks! The young men — **Djurt djurt** (the nankeen kestrel), **Thara** (the Quail hawk), as well as **Waang** — are now a rock formation at Clematis in the Dandenongs.

Adapted from Aldo Massola, *Bunjil's Cave*, quoted in *Melbourne Dreaming*, p. 24.

CSF Outcomes: ENGLISH:\*Speaking and Listening \*Reading \*Writing; SOSE:\*History \*Geography

**ACTIVITY SHEET – OUR PLACE IN THE WORLD**

Choose a place near to where you live – a stream, river, rock or hill. The Wurundjeri people would almost certainly have had a story about this place! It may no longer be known, but you can imagine what it might be like to see the world as the Wurundjeri saw it. Make up a Creation Story for the place you have chosen, thinking of a Dreamtime Being and how he or she might have created this part of the land, and still be present within it.

How do you think it might affect the things people do, and the way they live, if we saw the earth around us as sacred?

HOW \_\_\_\_\_  
WAS CREATED