

Ancient Australia

Victoria, like the rest of Australia, is home to many different groups of Aboriginal peoples who have their own language, culture and history. To gain a deeper understanding of the way people lived in ancient Australia, this chapter will focus on the people and culture of the Kulin nation.

The Kulin nation is made up of five different language groups. These groups were the custodians, or caretakers, of a large part of central and southern Victoria, including cities and towns such as Geelong, Bendigo, Melbourne, Healesville and Moe. Using techniques developed over thousands of years, the Kulin people carefully managed the land, which was their source for food, shelter, clothing and Dreaming stories.



Source 1 *Figures in possum skin cloaks* by William Barak, of the Wurundjeri people in Victoria, was painted in the late 1890s. It shows pairs of Elders wearing patterned cloaks.

chapter 8

8A

How did geographical features influence life in the Kulin nation?

- 1 The Kulin people lived according to the climate and natural features of the area they belonged to. Think about where you live and imagine that there are no buildings, transport or technology there. Suggest several aspects of your life that would be influenced by your natural environment.

8B

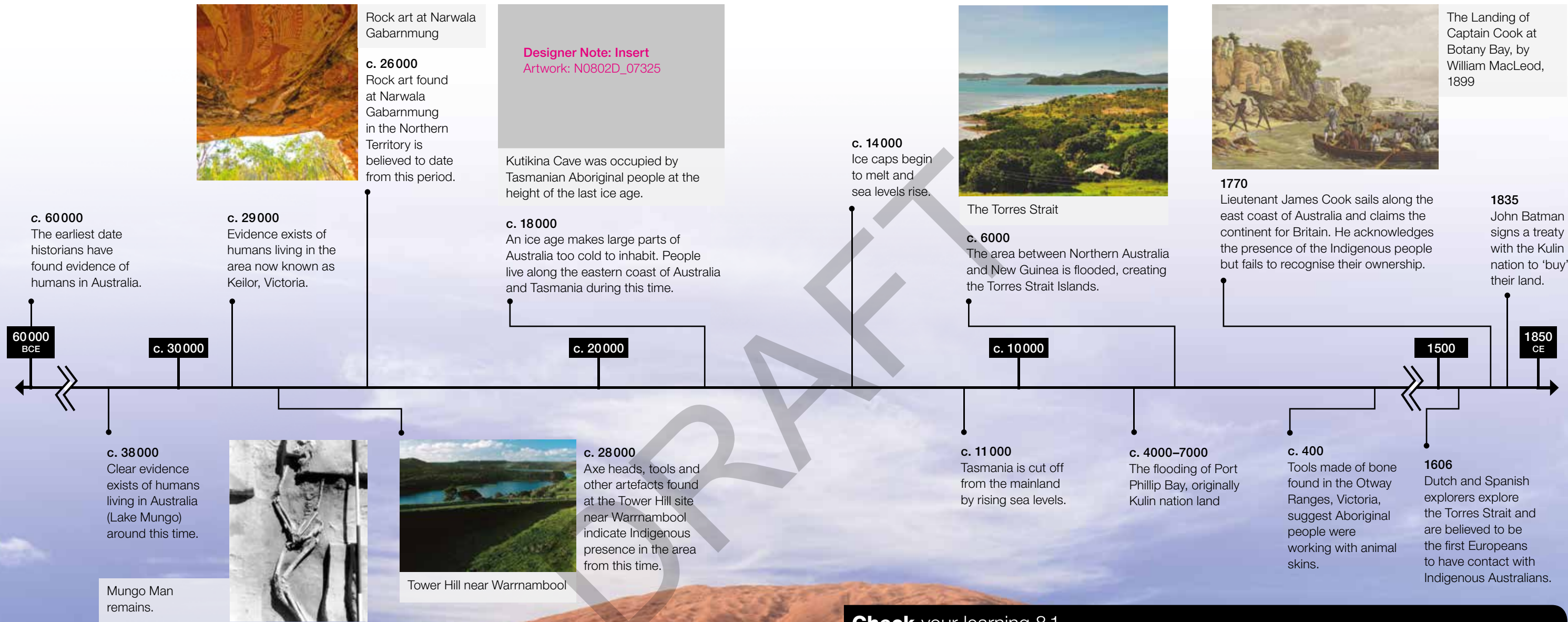
What was traditional life like for the people of the Kulin nation?

- 1 Over thousands of years, the Kulin people developed rich spiritual and cultural traditions that helped to shape their daily lives. Birth, adolescence and death were all marked by special rites and ceremonies. Give two examples of rites of passage from your own culture or religion.

Please note:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this chapter (and the resources that support it) may contain the names, images, stories and voices of people who have died.

8.1 Ancient Australia: a timeline



Source 1 A timeline of key events in ancient Australia

Reference guide	
Nation	A term for a group of Aboriginal peoples. A nation can be made up of a single culture or language group, or many cultures and language groups. For example, the Kulin nation is an alliance of five language groups located in southern and central Victoria.
Language group	A term for a group of Aboriginal peoples who share the same language. This can include smaller groups or clans who do not live together but speak the same language.
Woiworung	A language, or the name of the language group, in central to eastern Victoria. The Woiworung were part of the Kulin nation.
Wurundjeri	The group of peoples that speak Woiworung. They are made up of smaller groups or clans who mostly lived separately but who shared many customs and socialised together.

Check your learning 8.1

Remember and understand

- How long do historians believe there have been people living in Australia?
- When was Tasmania cut off from the mainland?
- What impact did the last ice age have on where people lived in Australia?

Analyse and apply

- Do you think cultures became different when Tasmania or the Torres Strait Islands were cut off from the mainland? Why?

Evaluate and create

- Examine the painting of Captain Cook's landing at Botany Bay. This work was created in 1899 by a European painter who did not know much about Aboriginal culture.
 - What does the painting show?
 - How realistic do you think it is? Explain your answer.

8.2 The environment and climate of the Kulin nation

The people of the Kulin nation have been living in Victoria for at least 40 000 years. They are made up of an alliance of five language groups: Wathaurong, Djadjawurung, Taungurong, Woiworung and Boonwurrung.

Geography and environment

The Kulin nation covered a large part of central and southern and central Victoria. Many of us will be familiar with the mountains, rivers, beaches, grasslands and forests on the lands of the Kulin nation.

The Indigenous Australians who lived around Melbourne were the Wurundjeri people from the Woiworung language group. The Wurundjeri people's diet, shelter, clothing and customs developed as a result of their understanding of the land and the climate of the area.

Up to 20 000 years ago, Port Phillip Bay was above sea level and the Yarra River flowed across this space. The flat, fertile river plain was filled with animals and plants. Rising sea levels around 6000 to 10 000 years ago caused the plain to flood and become Port Phillip Bay. This changed the lifestyle of the Woiworung and Boonwurrung groups who lived in this area.

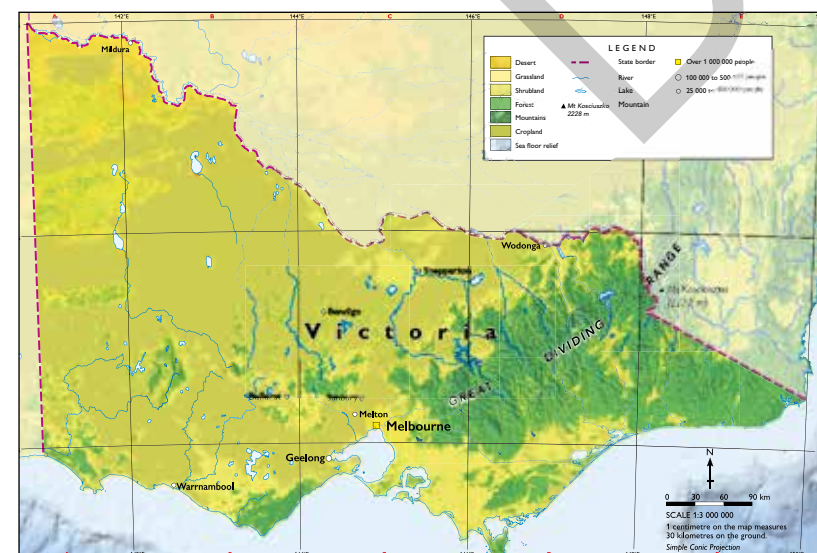
KULIN NATION LANGUAGE GROUPS



Source 1

Source: Oxford University Press

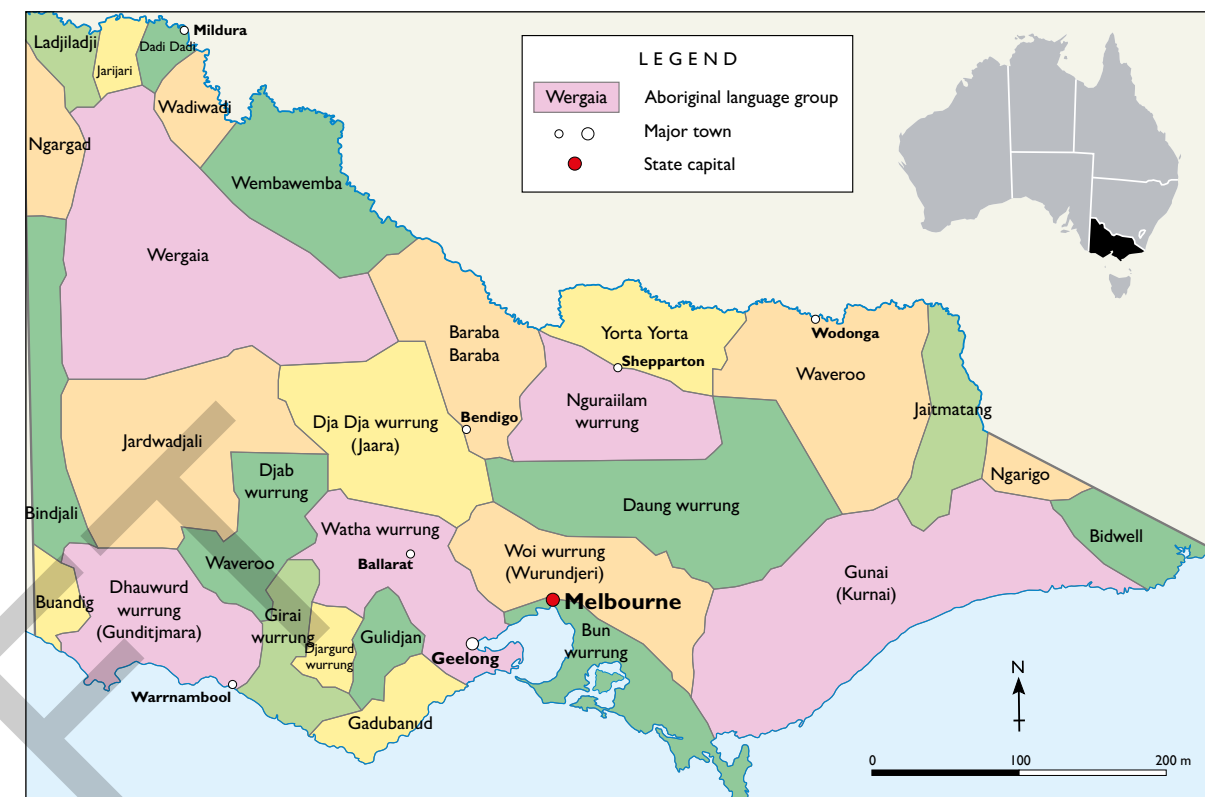
VICTORIA: ENVIRONMENTS



Source 2

Source: Oxford University Press

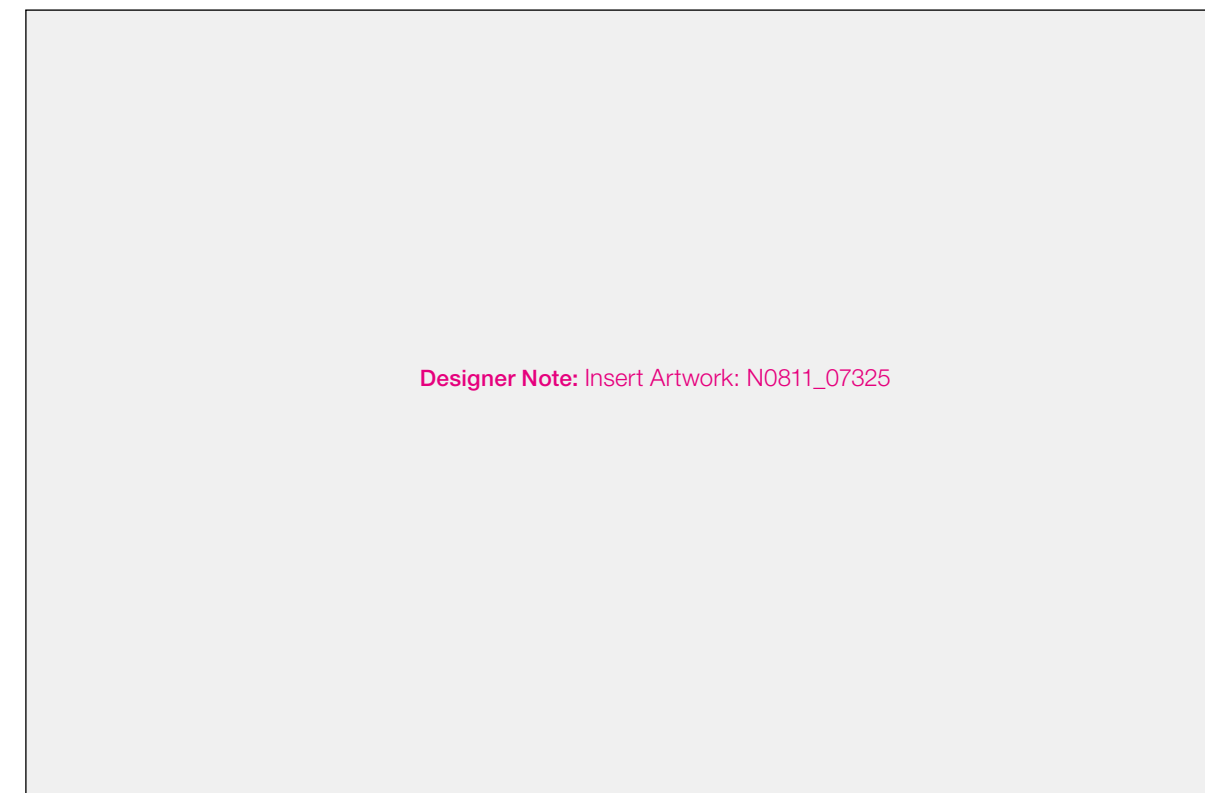
VICTORIA LANGUAGE GROUPS AND NATIONS



Source 3

Source: Oxford University Press

VICTORIA: CLIMATE ZONES



Source 4

Source: Oxford University Press

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Seasons

The Wurundjeri people identified up to seven seasons in their territory. These seasons were marked by changes in the weather, life cycles of plants and animals, and the position of stars in the night sky.

The Wurundjeri had to survive dry heat and hot north winds in summer, and cold frosts and occasional floods in winter. Because the weather could reach such extremes, the Wurundjeri lived in different areas throughout the year. Some would spend the coldest months in areas such as the Dandenong Ranges, where they sheltered in caves

and kept warm with rugs or cloaks made of possum skins. In the hottest months, they could camp on the coast, taking advantage of abundant supplies of fish and other seafood.

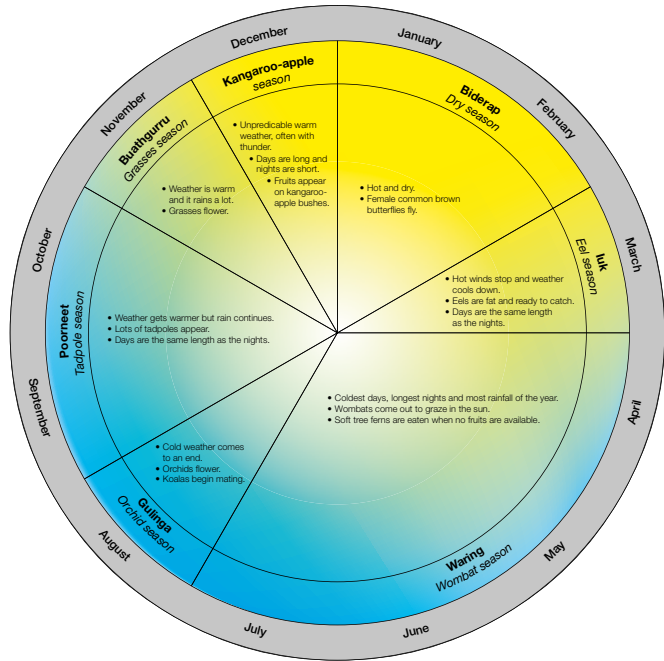
The types of foods they could eat would depend on the season. Nectar-rich banksia flowers, starchy root plants and mistletoe berries were all foods that became available after the first rains following the hot, dry season. As the land warmed after the coldest months, there were plenty of animals to hunt, plenty of root vegetables to dig up, and many different types of berries and seeds to collect.



Source 5 Aborigines at Merri Creek by Charles Troedel, 1865. This picture reflects the richness of the natural environment of the Kulin people who lived around Port Phillip Bay.



Source 7 Members of the Wurundjeri, a group of the Kulin nation, wearing traditional possum-skin cloaks



Source 6 The seven Wurundjeri seasons are very different from the four we know today.

Check your learning 8.2

Remember and understand

- 1 What are the five groups that made up the Kulin nation?
- 2 Identify two ways in which the lives of the Kulin people were affected by the climate and geography of the region.

Analyse and apply

- 3 What impact do you think the seasonable nature of food supplies would have had on the diet of the Wurundjeri people?

Evaluate and create

- 4 Think about the area where you live. Draw up a seasonal chart that you believe better reflects climatic and environmental changes than the traditional four seasons.

8.3 Creation stories of the Kulin nation

The people of the Kulin nation believe the land was created as part of the **Dreaming**. The creation stories they pass from generation to generation describe how their spiritual ancestors created the landscape and all its living creatures. The main spiritual ancestor of the Kulin people is Bunjil the eagle. It is said that Bunjil created the land, the sea, the rivers, the mountains, the animals and the trees.

The story of Bunjil the eagle

In the beginning there was nothing but the stars in the night sky. One star fell from the sky and, as it was falling, it became the body of an eagle. The eagle was Bunjil. As Bunjil fell, he spread his wings and blew air from his beak, creating Mother Earth. After creating Mother Earth, Bunjil created the animals. Bunjil then created man and woman.

When Bunjil had finished creating the landscape and animals, he grew tired of being on Earth. He collected his two wives and son and demanded that Bellin-Bellin, the musk crow, open one of his bags filled with wind. Bellin-Bellin obeyed and opened one of the bags, letting out a great gust of wind.

But Bunjil wasn't satisfied and demanded he let out even more wind. Bellin-Bellin opened all his bags, and a huge burst of wind flowed out, blowing Bunjil and his family all the way into the sky, where they became stars.

Source 1 To the people of the Kulin nation, Bunjil the eagle is the creator of all living things.



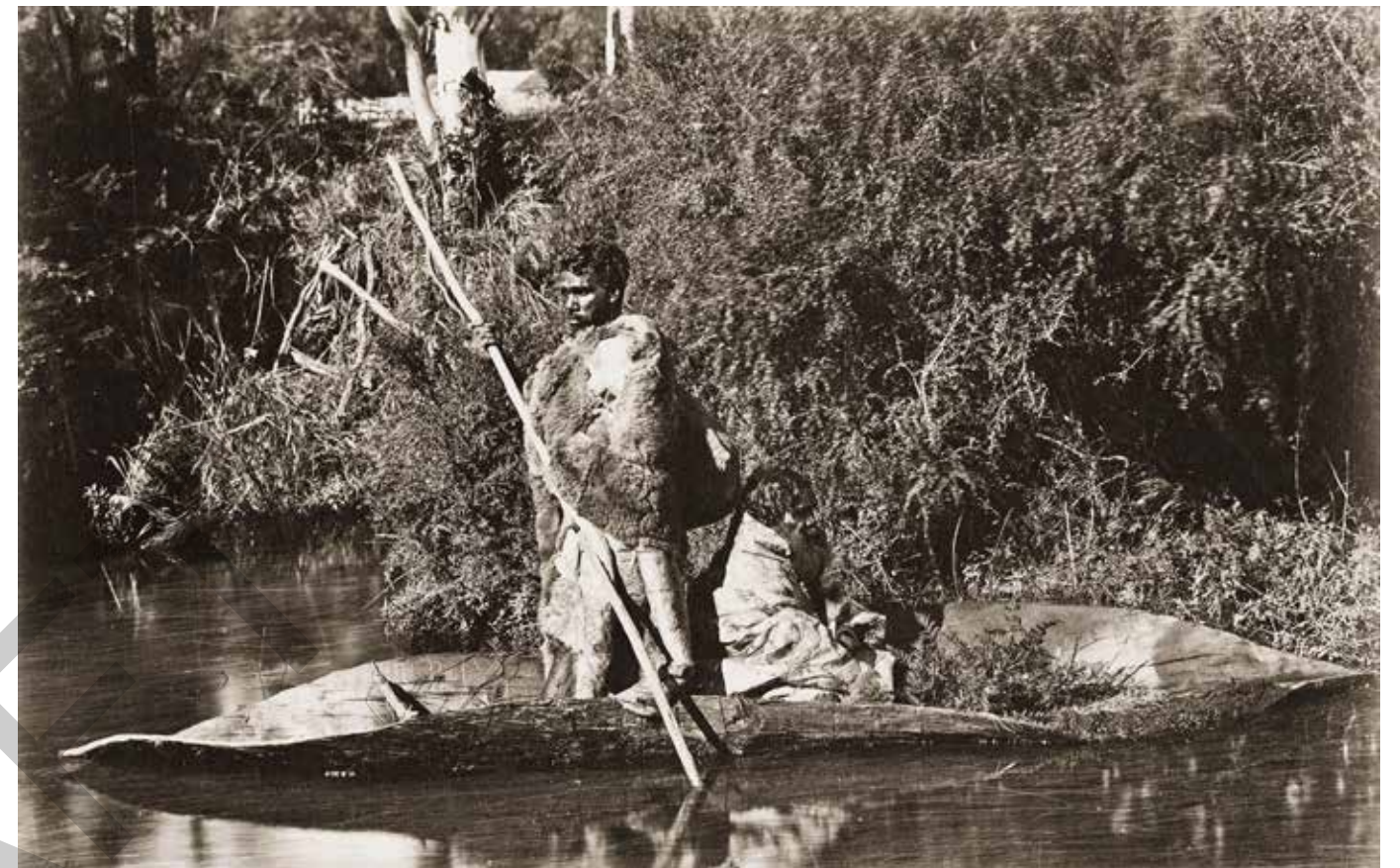
Source 2 This large sculpture of Bunjil the eagle by Bruce Armstrong was unveiled in Melbourne in 2002. It looks out over the Docklands and Wurundjeri Way.

The story of Birrarung (the Yarra river)

According to stories passed down through the generations, the creation of Birrarung was the work of a Wurundjeri Elder, Barwool.

A long time ago, the water of Birrarung was trapped in the mountains. Barwool wanted to release the water, known as Moorool, that was locked in a mountain. Barwool used a stone axe to cut a channel into the valley below and let the water run out.

Barwool later met Yan-yan, another Wurundjeri Elder, at the place now known as Warrandyte.



Source 3 Birrarung was an important part of Wurundjeri life.

Yan-yan was also trying to free a large body of water, known as Morang. Using their stone axes to free the water, the Elders joined Moorool and Morang to form Birrarung. They then continued to use their axes to cut a winding path for the water across the land, all the way to Port Phillip.

Birrarung, which means 'river of mists', is the Woiworung word for the Yarra river. In 1835, European settler and explorer John Helder Wedge named the river 'Yarra Yarra', because he thought it was the Wurundjeri word for the river. In truth, *yarra* means waterfall, and Wedge had made a mistake.

Check your learning 8.3

Remember and understand

- 1 Who is Bunjil to the Kulin nation?
- 2 According to the Dreaming story, which two bodies of water joined to become Birrarung?

Analyse and apply

- 3 What can you learn from the fact that a large sculpture of Bunjil has been placed in a newly developed area of Melbourne?
- 4 Look up 'Bunjil the eagle' on the Yarra Healing website and listen to Joy Murphy-Wandin speaking about Bunjil. Explain in your own words how Bunjil continues to be of significance to the Wurundjeri people.

Evaluate and create

- 5 Use photographs or drawings to prepare a step-by-step illustration of the story of Bunjil's creation or the creation of Birrarung of the Kulin nation.
- 6 Using the Internet, select one other creation story from another language group or nation. Identify and describe differences and similarities in comparison to the creation story of Bunjil the eagle.

8.4 Managing the land

The Wurundjeri people have a deep connection with Country. It provided them with everything they needed to live. As a result, they developed ways to respect and maintain the land and environment so that it could keep providing for them into the future.

The Wurundjeri developed techniques to care for the land based on a thorough understanding of the way nature worked. This understanding came from thousands of years of observation and oral tradition. The Wurundjeri knew how much food to gather and how much to leave, taking only what was needed. This knowledge meant that they did not overhunt or destroy animal and plant populations. Instead, animals and plants had time to recover or regenerate, so that there was always enough for people to hunt and gather in the years to come.

But the Wurundjeri’s careful use of the land was not the only way they looked after their environment. The use of fire was one of the most important elements of land management for many Aboriginal peoples around Australia.

Source 1 *View of Melbourne* by Robert Hoddle, 1840, State Library of Victoria. Historians used to think that land clearing around Melbourne was carried out after European arrival. It is now believed that Indigenous peoples shaped the land using traditional land management techniques such as fire-stick farming.

Fire-stick farming

One of the Wurundjeri’s most important land management techniques was fire-stick farming. They would set fire to land in sections at a time, creating a patchwork of burnt land. This type of controlled burning has many purposes, including:

- thinning out vegetation that might stop other plants from getting sunlight
- allowing new grass to grow, which would attract kangaroos looking for food
- causing seeds to germinate or begin to grow
- reducing the amount of fuel that could be burnt by a serious bushfire
- making travel or access easier by getting rid of thick undergrowth and encouraging open grassland between the trees.

Women could then work on these burnt patches of land with their *wulunj* (digging stick) looking for edible roots and tubers, such as yam daisies. In the process, they would thin out clumps of soil and replace roots.



Source 2 Using sticks to start a fire

The term ‘fire-stick farming’ comes from the method that Aboriginal peoples used to light fires. A base stick was made from a piece of soft wood. A wedge was cut into the wood and filled with fuel –

this could be dried animal droppings or dry grass. An upright stick was then inserted into the wedge and rotated swiftly. Eventually the fuel smouldered and caught fire.



Source 3 The use of controlled burning is an important part of modern bushfire control. This is a technique that Indigenous people have understood and used for thousands of years.

Check your learning 8.4

Remember and understand

- 1 How did the Wurundjeri people manage the land so that they would have enough to eat every year?
- 2 Give three reasons for fire-stick farming.

Analyse and apply

- 3 Explain why it is a good idea for us to manage our environment today by using ancient techniques such as fire-stick farming.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Follow the link in your obook to view a film about Indigenous fire-starting techniques. Write a step-by-step guide on how to light a fire without matches or other modern methods of ignition.

8A rich task

Caring for Country

For many Aboriginal peoples, land management is known as ‘caring for **Country**’. Caring for Country was an important part of their connection to the land that gave them life. A common idea in Aboriginal culture is that you only take from the land what you give back. This is shown in the way they looked after and preserved the environment that provided for them. Historians can use a range of **primary sources** and **secondary sources** to learn more about how the Kulin peoples took care of the land they lived on. These sources can include artefacts, paintings, oral accounts and other historical records.



Source 1 This illustration, by John Helder Wedge in 1835, shows women harvesting yam daisy tubers with digging sticks and turning the soil to help remaining tubers grow again for next year.

Source 2

The natives seem to have burned the grass systematically along every watercourse, and round every waterhole, in order to have them surrounded with young grass as soon as the rain sets in. ... Long strips of lately burnt grass were frequently observed extending for many miles along the creeks. The banks of small isolated waterholes in the forests were equally attended to ...

Explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, Journal of an Overland Expedition in Australia, T. & W. Boone, London, 1847.



Source 3 A digging stick or wulunj from the Kulin nation. All Wurundjeri women carried a long, fire-hardened stick like this to harvest roots and tubers.



Source 4 This scarred tree in the Fitzroy Gardens, Melbourne, shows where Aboriginal people removed a large section of bark to make a canoe. The tree kept living for many years after, but died lately in the 1980s. The trunk of the tree has been preserved as a reminder that the Wurundjeri people lived here long before Europeans settled.

skilldrill: Historical sources as evidence

Analysing primary and secondary sources

The primary and secondary sources that historians use to understand the past tell different stories. It is the job of historians to examine these sources and come to a conclusion about their usefulness and reliability.

- Step 1** Identify who wrote, produced or made the source. Is their personal perspective obvious in the source?
- Step 2** Identify what type of source it is. Was the source created at the time of the event or at a later date?
- Step 3** Find out when the source was created. How old is it? Is it an eyewitness account or did someone create it?
- Step 3** Decide why it was written or produced. Was it meant to entertain or argue something? Does its creator have anything to gain personally from producing the source? What may have influenced its creator?

Apply the skill

- Can modern historians develop a complete understanding of the ways that Wurundjeri people lived before Europeans arrived?
- Examine Sources 1–4 and complete a copy of the table below.
- Once you have completed the table, use the information you have collected to write a short paragraph about life in the Kulin nation before Europeans arrived.

	Is it a primary or secondary source?	What kind of source is it? (e.g. painting, photograph, artefact)	Who created the source?	What does the source show or describe?	How does the source show or describe the way Kulin people cared for Country?
Source 1					
Source 2					
Source 3					
Source 4					

Extend your understanding

Historical sources are often more useful to a historian when they can access additional information about a particular source. Look at Source 5.

Source 5

In the forests and hills, possum was also a staple source of food and clothing. The flesh of the possum was cooked and eaten, while the skin was saved to be sewn into valuable waterproof cloaks. These cloaks were fastened at the shoulder and extended to the knees.

‘Wurundjeri-willam: Aboriginal Heritage of Merri Creek’, by the Merri Creek Management Committee, viewed 15 July 2016 at http://mcmc.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=31&Itemid=216

- What can you learn from this source about the Wurundjeri people?
- How would you go about finding out how accurate or reliable this source is?
- Suggest two additional sources that you could investigate to gain additional information about the life of Wurundjeri people before colonisation.

8.5 Spiritual connection to the land

Aboriginal peoples have a strong spiritual connection to the land through their Dreaming. The Dreaming is about the knowledge, beliefs and practices that originated from creation stories, which describe how the landforms and life on Earth came into being. The Dreaming guides the way people live on the land and how to care for it. For the Wurundjeri people, their beliefs are present in different sacred objects and cultural practices, such as totems, sacred sites, initiation rites and funeral rituals.

Totems

In Aboriginal culture, a **totem** is the sacred object or symbol of a person or an entire group. When something is sacred, it means it has important spiritual value. A totem was thought to be a spiritual protector. When Wurundjeri children were given a personal totem, it was usually an animal from their land, such as a wallaby or wombat. That animal was their spiritual ancestor throughout life, protecting them and connecting them to Country. In return, that person would never kill, eat or disrespect their totem.

Language groups and nations could also have a totem that would guide and protect them. Wurundjeri have two **moiety totems**: Bunjil the eagle and Waa the crow (or raven). Moiety indicates a

person's family relationship and refers to one of two groups into which a society is divided. A person's moiety was inherited from their father and was an important part of the Wurundjeri's social structure. For example, people with the same moiety were considered siblings and were not allowed to marry.

Sacred sites

All of Country was special to the Wurundjeri peoples, but some places were particularly spiritual or significant. These **sacred sites** included places where totems appeared, or where sacred rituals, ceremonial gatherings or important trading took place.

Sacred sites were mostly made up of natural features, such as hills, rivers, rock formations or trees. These places required complete respect from the people who went there. Some sacred sites were for men or women only. These were places where 'secret men's business' or 'secret women's business' would take place. These places had great spiritual and cultural value to the Wurundjeri people that could not be shared with outsiders.

Significant Wurundjeri places or sites include:

- Bolin Bolin Billabong – a place for sacred or social gatherings between groups
- Dights Falls – a meeting place for trade and settling disputes

- Pound Bend – a significant living and gathering place
- Hanging Rock – a site for male initiation ceremonies
- natural amphitheatres such as the site of the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) – a place for social gatherings and ceremonies.

Around Australia, other sacred sites include places such as Uluru in the Northern Territory, Wilpena Pound in South Australia and the Pinnacles in Western Australia.

Initiation ceremonies

In Aboriginal communities, girls and boys would be 'initiated' in ceremonies that celebrated their becoming adults. Children would be initiated when the community thought they were physically and mentally ready to become adults. They had to earn the right to be initiated.

Non-indigenous people are not allowed to attend these ceremonies, so it is difficult for people who are outsiders to know exactly what goes on.

For the Wurundjeri, boys being initiated were given items to signify their manhood, such as strips of possum skin and a narrow bone for their nose.

Funeral ceremonies

All Aboriginal communities had a deep respect for the dead. Some groups believed that the spirit of the dead person remained near the place of death. Others believed the spirit of the dead would join their spiritual ancestors in the Dreaming. The nature of their mourning or grieving was meant to comfort the spirit, and ceremonies were different for each language group.

Some societies had different funeral practices for men and women. It was suggested by European observers that among the Wurundjeri people, funeral ceremonies were far more complex for men than for women.

In some Aboriginal communities, once a person had passed away, people were not allowed to say their name again. This is to make sure the spirit is not called back to this world, and is allowed to continue on its journey. It is also out of respect for the family of the person who has passed. Many Indigenous Australians observe this practice to this day.



Source 2 Hanging Rock, a sacred site for the Djadjawurung, Taungurong and Wurundjeri peoples of the Kulin nation.

Check your learning 8.5

Remember and understand

- 1 What kind of totem might a Wurundjeri person be given?
- 2 Why don't we know everything about initiation ceremonies?

Analyse and apply

- 3 Can you suggest why there were separate ceremonies for men and women in many aspects of Aboriginal life?

Evaluate and create

- 4 Using what you have learnt in this unit, create a mind map of the different ways Wurundjeri people were spiritually connected to the land.



Source 1 The crow and the eagle were common totems for the Wurundjeri people.

8.6 Daily life

People of the Kulin nation relied on Country for their everyday life. To get the best out of their environment, they knew all about the changes of the seasons and the features of the land. They worked with the cycles of nature, rather than against them, to develop a way of living that was in harmony with Country.

Bush tucker







The Kulin people found their food in the environment around them. Men hunted large animals, including kangaroos and emus. Women also hunted, but mostly smaller animals. The women also gathered plants, eggs, seeds and fruits. In coastal areas and near rivers and lakes, people could catch things such as fish, shellfish and eels.

The manna gum was particularly important to the Wurundjeri people, and it is where their name comes from. *Wurun* is the name for the manna gum and *djeri* is the name of a grub found on the tree. The Wurundjeri used wattle trees to create boomerangs and spear throwers for hunting. Wattle branches were often bent at the perfect angle for a boomerang. They also used the sap from the wattle as a drink, and wattle seeds were ground into flour by the women using grinding stones to make damper (a kind of bread).



Source 1 A grinding stone

Another important food was the yam daisy, or *murnong* in Woiworung. Women would gather the tubers (the fleshy stems growing underground) of these plants using digging sticks. They could be eaten raw, but they were much sweeter when roasted in the coals of a fire. The Wurundjeri would also find ant eggs on the red stringybark. These could be mixed with the powdered bark of the stringybark to be eaten as a sweet treat that tasted like butter and sugar.

Plant						
	Manna gum	Yam daisy (murnong)	Wattle	Honey pots	Common apple berry	Prickly currant bush
Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The sap is good for drinking.• Djeri (grubs) can be found in the bark.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their tubers are good for eating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Branches can be made into boomerangs.• The sap is good for drinking.• The seeds can be ground into flour for damper.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nectar can be sucked from the flowers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The fruits can be eaten after they are dropped by the plant.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The fruits, which taste like currants, can be eaten in summer.

Source 2 Examples of bush tucker in the Kulin nation.

Hunting

The Kulin people developed many techniques for hunting and trapping animals and fish. For example, they used controlled burning to flush out animals such as kangaroos from thick bush. They would then use spears and boomerangs to hunt them down (see Source 3).

Spears in the Woiworung region were often made from tea-tree branches and were about 3 metres long. A straight stem would be chosen and crafted with a stone scraper. The spear tip could have a sharpened point or a stone flake attached to it. These spears could be thrown with amazing accuracy when used with a throwing stick.

Wurundjeri people living along the Birrarung fished with spears and used woven traps to catch eels. They would also set traps along the coast to catch fish and eels. This was a common practice for many groups who lived near rivers or the coast. Source 4 shows how some Aboriginal groups used woven branches to trap and catch fish.



Source 4 A fish trap made of woven branches

Source 3 In this painting by Joseph Lycett, c. 1820, Aboriginal men use fire to find and hunt kangaroos.



It is likely that the Kulin people would have also hunted **megafauna** when they existed thousands of years ago. Megafauna in Australia were giant animals that have mostly become extinct. In particular, giant marsupials called *Diprotodon* were believed to have lived in Victoria around 50000 years ago (see Source 5).









Source 5 Diprotodon lived in Victoria around 50000 years ago.

Bush medicine

The Kulin people also relied on the land to keep them healthy, using **bush medicine** if they were sick or hurt. Bush medicine was based on knowledge handed down through generations. This knowledge taught them how their surroundings could help them to treat sickness or injury. For example, crushed grubs could be applied to skin irritations and burns. The kangaroo apple was used as a treatment for joint pain. The fruit was also eaten as a delicacy, but people had to be sure that it was ripe, because the unripe fruit is poisonous.

Traditional crafts and tools

The Wurundjeri had clever techniques for creating tools and other items needed for everyday activities. For example, they wove baskets, bags, mats and nets from reeds, root fibres or bark. They even used human hair and animal fur to twist it into string. These items were sometimes decorated with things such as echidna spines and kangaroo teeth, which were also used to make necklaces or to adorn clothing.

Medicine	Uses
River red gum 	The sap was used to seal burns. Mixed with water, it could treat diarrhoea.
River mint 	Leaves were crushed and inhaled to treat coughs or colds.
Woolly tea-tree 	Leaves could treat breathing problems.
Manna gum 	The smoke of older leaves could reduce fever.
Grubs 	These were crushed and applied to the skin to soothe irritation or burns.
Kangaroo apple 	The fruit were pulped and crushed to make a paste to treat joint pain.

Source 6 Examples of bush medicine from the Kulin nation

Women used the dried leaves of mat rush (sometimes called ‘basket grass’), and a small sharpened stick or bone to weave strong baskets. These strong baskets would have been useful for collecting many food items. Some baskets could be woven so tightly they could carry water in them.

The Wurundjeri would sometimes use the inner bark of the red stringybark to make string. Women would roll the strips of bark on their thighs. They would then tie these lengths of string together to make a strong rope.

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Source 7 Wurundjeri women used reeds, mat rush and bark to weave strong baskets for carrying food.

Shelter

The kind of shelter a group would build depended on the environment they lived in. Aboriginal peoples often moved around, occupying different areas of Country throughout the year. But this was not always the case.

Some groups within the Kulin nation built strong shelters of timber and bark, and stayed for a long time if there was enough food to gather and hunt. Some groups also used the caves and rock formations of the region to shelter. Other groups who moved around more frequently built their shelters out of tree branches and bark. They would build a sturdy frame from wattle tree branches and cover it with thick slabs of bark (see Source 8). Piles of bracken ferns covered in soft possum-skin rugs would serve as mattresses.



Source 8 A traditional shelter at Coranderrk, near Healesville, Victoria

More permanent shelters were built in the Lake Condah region in western Victoria. There is evidence that the local Gunditjmara people lived in villages there around 8000 years ago. Their society was based on farming eels. Their shelters consisted of circular stone foundations on which dome-shaped huts were built (see Source 9). It is believed this settlement was home to around one thousand people.

Check your learning 8.6

Remember and understand

- 1 Identify three types of bush medicine used by the Kulin people.
- 2 Why did the Kulin people build different types of shelter?

Analyse and apply

- 3 Why was the manna gum so important to the Wurundjeri people?
- 4 Why do you think different groups would have had different techniques for hunting and fishing?

Evaluate and create

- 5 Using what you have learnt in this unit, create a Venn diagram on the similarities and differences of the roles of men and women in gathering food for the community.

8.7 Kinship and family relationships

Kinship is an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives. It refers to a system of rules that organise their family and social life. The kinship system made sure everyone knew what their responsibilities were within the community.

As with other Aboriginal cultural practices, kinship worked differently in groups across Australia, but some ideas were important to everyone. For example, gift giving was an important part of kinship, as a way of strengthening social bonds between families and alliances between groups.

The idea of family was also central to the kinship system. Unlike European families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples did not just care for the people directly related to them. Children could have a close relationship with relatives other than their mother and father. For example, their aunts and uncles would also be called their mother and father. Cousins could also be called brother and sister. Older people who were not related to them at all could be called aunty or uncle. While the terms and rules around family relationships could be different across groups, caring for their community as a family was always very important.



Source 1 Family relationships were an important part of kinship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples' lives. A child could have many mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles within the community.

Elders

Elders were a very important part of each group within the Kulin nation. They played a key role in running the community from day to day. Elders would lead by example. It was their role to show young people the importance of the natural world.

They would teach younger people about bush tucker and bush medicines, and share knowledge about the Dreaming through songs and stories. If there was a problem or dispute in the community, the Elders would make a decision together about how to settle things. Elders would also lead initiation ceremonies for young people.

A person did not just automatically become an elder when they got old. Respect and authority had to be earned by showing understanding and dedication to the community. Wurundjeri Elders can be either men or women. The leader of a Wurundjeri clan's Elders was known as the *Ngurungaeta* (headman).



Marriage

There were strict rules about marriage in the Kulin nation as part of the kinship system. Love was not the most important factor when a marriage was arranged. Relationships in the Kulin nation had a lot to do with their totems. A marriage had to be between a man and a woman of different moieties (totems or symbols). Among the Kulin people, those whose moiety totem was the eagle often married people whose moiety was the crow. A person could not marry someone with the same moiety. This meant people did not have to marry their relatives, but could move between groups instead.

The traditions and ceremonies surrounding marriages were also different across groups. In some areas there was no marriage ceremony. The young woman would simply move to live with her husband's people. In other groups, a marriage ceremony was held. This could involve special face and body painting, music and dancing, and the smoking of leaves to ward off bad spirits and give good fortune to the newly married couple.

Source 2 Elders played an important role in passing down knowledge and keeping order in a community.

Check your learning 8.7

Remember and understand

- 1 What is kinship?
- 2 Who were the important people in Aboriginal families or groups? How did they become so important?

Analyse and apply

- 3 Why was it important to have strict rules about marriage?

- 4 Consider what it means to be an elder in our society, such as your grandparents. How is their role different to the role of Elders in the Kulin nation?

Evaluate and create

- 5 Think about your family at home. How is it different or similar to the families of the Kulin nation?
- 6 Using the information in this unit, create a mind map identifying the different elements of the kinship system.

8.8 Contact and conflict between Indigenous groups

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples in Australia largely lived in harmony with each other. Most of the time, Indigenous groups travelled and hunted within their own traditional lands and maintained separate cultures, but they also had contact with other groups in their region. There were many different reasons for contact between groups – sometimes it was social and sometimes it was for trade. There is also some evidence of conflict between groups.

Social contacts

For groups within the Kulin nation, social contacts were common and an important part of daily life. They met on special occasions such as initiation rituals and marriage ceremonies. The most widely practised ceremonial gathering for the Kulin peoples was the **corroboree**. Several groups would gather for a corroboree, so they could involve hundreds of people and go on for several days.

Ceremonial dancing, storytelling and music were important parts of corroborees, with different groups often competing to outperform each other. Preparing for a corroboree involved body painting and special ceremonial clothing (see Source 2). People traded goods and shared food at corroborees. They were also a good opportunity for the Elders from different groups to get together and settle disputes or decide on punishments for people who had broken traditional Aboriginal laws.



Source 2 This photograph taken in the 1850s shows an Aboriginal man in Victoria wearing traditional clothing and body paint for a corroboree.

Source 1 *Aboriginal dancing scene* by William Barak of the Wurundjeri people in Victoria shows Aboriginal men performing a dance. The bottom half of the drawing shows a group of people in elaborately decorated possum-skin cloaks sitting and clapping.



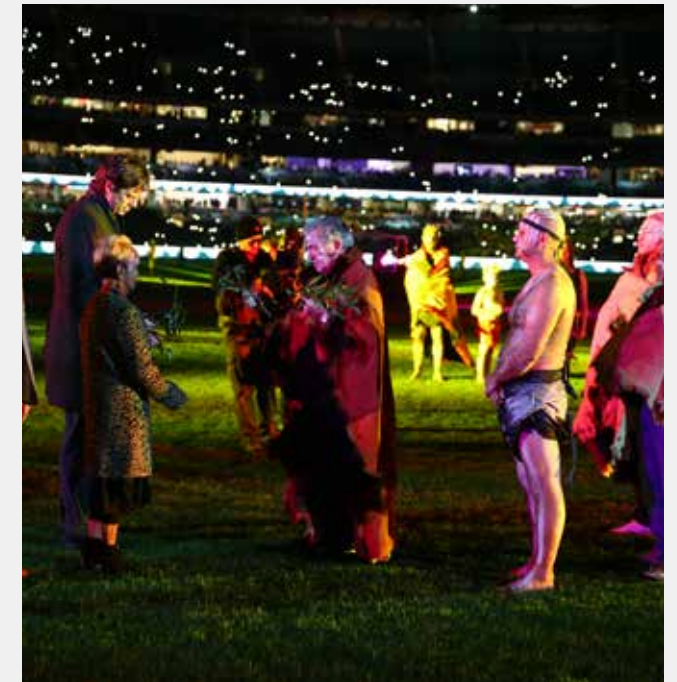
keyconcept: Significance

Tanderrum – the Kulin ‘Welcome to Country’

Among peoples of the Kulin nation, the ‘Welcome to Country’ ceremony was known as a *tanderrum*.

When visitors wanted to enter Kulin lands, the Kulin people would form a large circle, with men on one side and women on the other. Visiting Elders were invited into the circle. Leaves from the manna gum were burnt and the visitors would pass through the smoke to cleanse themselves and show their respect for the culture and laws of the Kulin nation. The smoking ceremony was often accompanied by song and dance. Visitors were asked to look after and protect the land. They were handed gum leaves to protect them while they were visiting Country and to give them permission to share the local resources.

The tanderrum ceremony is still performed today, and many school functions, sporting events and public festivals around Victoria often begin with this traditional welcome.



Source 3 A tanderrum is held every year to welcome visitors to Dreamtime at the ‘G match between AFL teams Richmond and Essendon. The match takes place at the MCG on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people.

Trading contacts

Long before Europeans arrived in Australia, Indigenous peoples had developed a complex network of overland pathways (trading routes). These pathways criss-crossed the country and even extended to the islands of the Torres Strait.

In order to travel between different territories, travellers and traders needed to receive permission from the traditional custodians. Visitors seeking permissions usually brought gifts for the people whose land they were passing through. In return, a special ceremony was held to welcome the visitors – known as ‘Welcome to Country’.

For the Aboriginal people, trade wasn’t just limited to physical objects, such as tools and clothing; it also included stories, songs, dances, art, rituals and ceremonies. Unlike other ancient civilisations, the Aboriginal people never developed a system of money. Instead, they bartered (exchanged) goods. For example, one highly crafted possum-skin cloak would be exchanged for three axes.

People could swap items they had easy access to for items they didn’t have in their own lands.

For example, ancient tools made from shells and fish bones have been discovered in central Australia, hundreds of kilometres from the sea.

The cultural groups of the Kulin nation had well-established trading networks. In the north of Woiworong country near *Will-im-ee Mooring* (Mount William), the Wurundjeri established a quarry. The green stone found in this area was ideal for making axe heads (known as *murring*). In recent years, axe heads mined at this quarry have been discovered as far away as Adelaide and parts of central New South Wales, meaning that they were traded far and wide across Australia.

Songlines

To assist people travelling through unfamiliar territory for trade, songs were developed to help visitors and traders remember important landmarks and help them find their way. These pathways were called ‘songlines’. Using songlines, a knowledgeable person could navigate their way across large distances by repeating the words of the song.

Conflict between different Indigenous groups

Contact between different Indigenous groups for social events and trade was usually friendly, but occasionally conflict broke out. Arguments over access to water or hunting rights could cause conflicts – especially during times of drought. Competition between men over women could also be a cause of conflict. Rock paintings from pre-colonial times show warriors armed with weapons. There are also stories of revenge attacks for murders believed to have been the result of sorcery.

Early British colonists in the Port Phillip District reported on tensions and conflicts between peoples of the Kulin nation and the Kurnai people of present-day Gippsland. Very little evidence of this (or any other instances of wars breaking out) is available. We do know that very few conflicts were fought over territory. The land was so closely tied to the identities of particular people that the idea of taking another group's traditional land was almost unthinkable.

Weapons and warfare

The types of weapons used by Indigenous groups varied throughout Australia, but in the Kulin nation the most common weapons used for fighting included:

- spears (and spear throwers) – spears were generally about 3 metres long and made from the strong wood of the tea tree. The Kulin used a spear thrower called a *murri wan* to hurl (throw) spears with great accuracy over long distances.
- shields – these were used to block attacks from enemy spears and clubs. They were carved from the bark of strong hardwood trees such as manna gum and acacia (wattle), and decorated with patterns and symbols.
- boomerangs – there were many different types of boomerangs and some were designed for fighting. Fighting boomerangs were a different shape to hunting boomerangs. They were longer and flatter and not designed to return when they were thrown. Skilled Wurundjeri men carved deadly fighting boomerangs from acacia wood.
- clubs – a variety of different-sized clubs were also used during warfare. These were also carved from different types of hardwood.



Source 4 This photograph taken at the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station near Melbourne around 1877 shows a range of different weapons and tools used by the peoples of the Kulin nation.

Settling conflicts

Indigenous peoples, including those from the Kulin nation, had well-developed laws and systems to settle conflicts and maintain peace and order. Much of the **customary law** (traditional Aboriginal law) was based on the Dreaming stories. Customary law was administered by a council of Elders from different groups across the Kulin nation who often met at ceremonial gatherings such as corroborees.

The council of Elders could also set punishments for wrongdoers within their communities. Traditional Aboriginal punishments could take a wide variety of forms depending on the crime. Many other factors were also taken into account, such as the age, gender, social standing and previous history of the wrongdoer. Punishments could include:

- shaming or public ridicule – individuals could be placed in a circle of people or Elders with everyone talking at them
- exclusion from the community – individuals were sent away for a specific period or could be banished forever
- duels – individuals could be punished by relatives or friends of the people they had hurt by having spears, boomerangs or fighting sticks used on them
- physical punishment – this could involve spearing or burning the hair from the wrongdoer's body
- death – this could be carried out directly on an individual or 'sorcery' could be used. Sorcery involved something similar to 'casting a spell' on the wrongdoer).

8B What was traditional life like for the people of the Kulin nation?



Source 5 Traditional Aboriginal punishments varied, depending on the crime. This illustration shows a wrongdoer being punished for a crime by having spears thrown at him. He has only a shield to protect him. Punishments like this rarely resulted in serious injury or death, but were designed to be a deterrent.

Check your learning 8.8

Remember and understand

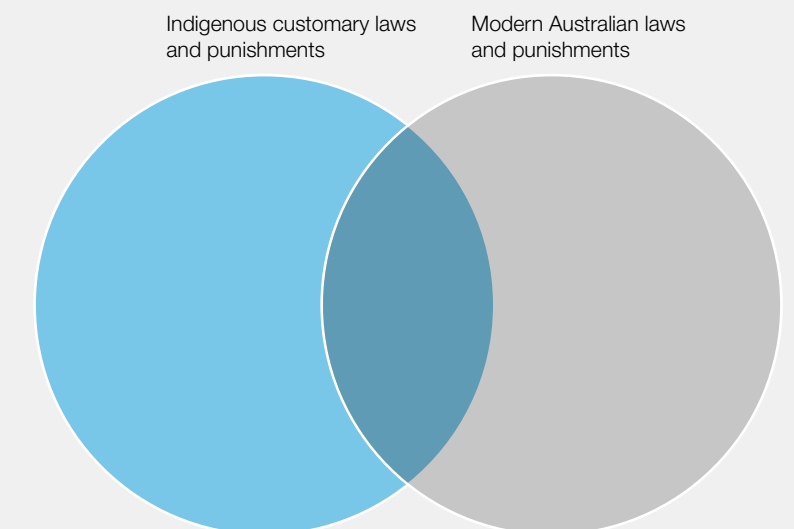
- 1 What is a *tanderrum*?
- 2 What types of activities took place at corroborees?
- 3 What are songlines and how did they help people find their way across large distances?
- 4 What types of fighting weapons were most commonly used by the Kulin people?

Analyse and apply

- 5 What evidence is there to suggest that items such as axes and tools were traded over large distances?

Evaluate and create

- 6 Copy the Venn diagram below into your notebook and use it to compare Indigenous customary laws and punishments with modern-day Australian laws and punishments. Place the things you know about the two systems that are unique in the left and right circles. Place the things common to both systems in the middle section.



8.9 Contact and conflict with outsiders

Historians have small amounts of evidence of the first Australians having contact with outsiders – both from Asia and Europe – before the arrival of British colonists in 1788.

Contact with Asia

Northern Australia's closeness to Asia had led some historians to believe that contact between Indigenous Australians and traders from China and Indonesia was highly likely. Evidence suggests that sailors from a region in modern-day Indonesia called Makassar visited Australia as far back as 800 years ago, travelling on sailing boats known as *proa*. Initially they came to fish and collect sea cucumbers to trade with the Chinese, but historians believe that Makassan sailors also traded with the Indigenous people in northern Australia such as the Yolgnu in Arnhem Land. They are believed to have brought fishing and cooking tools with them and exchanged these for pearl shells. It is also likely that some Chinese and Makassan visitors remained in Australia.

Indigenous groups in northern Australia and the Torres Strait also had contact with people from Papua New Guinea. These people are believed to have visited northern Australia on a regular basis to trade with local Indigenous groups. Today, a strong Papuan influence on traditional Indigenous items such as ornamental masks provides evidence of this contact. It has also been noted that the languages of Indigenous people in Cape York Peninsula in Queensland and Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory contain words that originally come from the native languages of Papua New Guinea.

Contact with Europeans

Possibly the earliest European contact with Australia was made by the Portuguese. Around 1520, a Portuguese expedition is believed to have sailed down the east coast of Australia. While there is no definite proof of this, some historians believe that

a wrecked ship seen near Warrnambool during the 19th century was part of this expedition. This wreck became known as 'The Mahogany Ship'.

Dutch explorers including Willem Janszoon, Dirk Hartog, Abel Tasman and Anthony van Diemen definitely explored the Australian coastline in the 17th century. Some of these Dutch explorers landed on Australian soil and made contact with the Indigenous peoples. There are also suggestions that some shipwrecked Dutch sailors even lived with Indigenous peoples in Western Australia.



Source 1 Many examples of Indigenous rock art around Australia record the arrival of ships from Europe. This example from Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory shows a British ship, but historians believe other examples may show the arrival of earlier Europeans such as the Portuguese and Dutch.

Arrival of the British

When the British arrived in 1788, everything changed for the Aboriginal peoples of Australia. Within years of the colonisation of Sydney, the destruction of traditional Indigenous life and culture had begun. At the heart of the conflict between the two groups were two radically different ideas about landownership. Indigenous people believed that they belonged to the land and that its gifts were there to be shared. Europeans believed that they owned the land and that its resources were there to serve their needs alone. Physically, socially and spiritually, these two ways of



life could not coexist. Shortly after their arrival, the British set about disrupting the traditions and cultures of Indigenous Australians, pushing them off the lands they had occupied for thousands of years. European diseases such as smallpox and influenza (which Indigenous people had never been exposed to before) also spread rapidly, killing many people.

Contact between the Kulin nation and Europeans

The first significant contact between European colonists and the Kulin people occurred along the southern coast of Victoria around 1800. British colonists hunting seals and whales were common in Bass Strait around this time. Contact with local Indigenous peoples including the Boonwurrung often led to violence and the spread of European diseases through the local Indigenous population.

Port Philip District 1836

The establishment of a colony in Melbourne in 1836 had terrible effects on the Wurundjeri people. By 1839, most of the Wurundjeri people had been displaced from their land. John Batman 'purchased' 600 000 acres around Melbourne in June 1835. Although the 'purchase' was declared invalid only 2 months later, the land was still taken from the Indigenous owners and leased or sold to colonists.

By 1850, estimates suggest that only about 3000 Wurundjeri remained. Today, recognition of the place of the Wurundjeri people in Melbourne's history and culture is growing and is increasingly a part of public events and celebrations.

Source 2 The founding of Australia by Captain Arthur Phillip, a painting by Algernon Talmage, 1939. The arrival of the British in 1788 had a devastating effect on the Indigenous peoples and cultures of Australia.



Source 3 Batman's treaty with the aborigines at Merri Creek, 6th June 1835, painted by John Wesley Burt, c. 1875. It depicts Batman's meeting with the Wurundjeri people and the 'signing' of a 'treaty' to 'buy' their land. Laid out on blankets nearby are some items, including mirrors, beads and shirts, as payment for the enormous stretch of land. The Wurundjeri did not understand at that time that Batman wanted to take their land from them.

Check your learning 8.9

Remember and understand

- 1 What were the main reasons for the decline in Indigenous populations after the arrival of the British in 1788?
- 2 Name the different groups of people believed to have visited Australia before the British arrived.

Apply and analyse

- 3 Explain the different concepts of landownership of the Europeans and the Indigenous people.
- 4 Examine the painting in Source 2.
 - a How reliable is this painting as a historical source? Support your answer.
 - b What aspects of the beginnings of Sydney are not included in this painting? Can you offer an explanation for this?

8B rich task

Keeping culture strong

For almost 200 years, many non-Indigenous Australians denied the history, culture and beliefs of Indigenous Australians. Changes in attitudes and laws since the 1960s have led to greater recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in the daily lives of all Australians.

Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags fly alongside the Australian flag, and the traditional custodians of the land are acknowledged at most public gatherings. However, Indigenous people remain among the most disadvantaged Australians, and there is still a great deal of progress to be made before full recognition and equality can be achieved.



Source 1 The Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival is held every 2 years in far north Queensland. Over 20 communities participate across the region, with up to 500 performers.



Across Australia and the Torres Strait Islands today, many programs and events have been put in place. These programs are designed to:

- educate non-Indigenous Australians about the traditional customs of the first Australians
- build better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians
- help repair some of the damage caused by colonisation and keep Indigenous culture, language and spiritual beliefs strong.

Cultural programs, festivals and changes have been introduced to recognise and celebrate Indigenous culture, and to keep it strong for future generations. Many of these have been developed by, or in consultation with, local Indigenous groups. For example:

- Many local council websites include information on the customs of the traditional Aboriginal custodians, and Indigenous walking trails educate the public on the traditional ways of the first Australians.
- Many landmarks, parks and regions are being renamed in the Indigenous language of the region (e.g. Uluru, Kata-Tjuta, Gariwerd).
- Indigenous art programs are run through school or by Elders to teach young Indigenous people about the culture and beliefs of their people. Indigenous art and culture is part of all collections in all major galleries and museums.
- Indigenous languages are now being taught in more than 260 schools across Australia.
- Major organisations, companies, government departments and sporting clubs are developing policies and programs to increase the visibility of Indigenous people and awareness of Indigenous issues. For example, there are currently over 70 Indigenous players in AFL teams and the Indigenous round has become a highlight of the AFL calendar.

Source 2 Indigenous AFL player Adam Goodes and Qantas support the Recognise campaign to recognise Indigenous Australians in the constitution.

skilldrill: Historical sources as evidence

Creating and delivering an audiovisual presentation

Audiovisual presentations are a good way to communicate the findings of your research to an audience by using a range of visual sources (such as photographs, maps and infographics) and audio sources (such as interviews and songs) to make your presentation informative and fun. To create and deliver an interesting and relevant audiovisual presentation, follow these steps:

Step 1 Develop the research question (or questions).

You will need to work out exactly what topic your audiovisual presentation will explore. Make a list of points you will need to cover.

Step 2 Gather your research. Find and collect a range of reliable sources that will help you answer your research question. Ideally, you should have a combination of primary and secondary sources. Make sure these sources are reliable and accurate.

Step 3 Plan and create your presentation. Plan your presentation to make sure that it addresses the question (or questions) that you set out to explore. Decide on the format that you will use; for example, PowerPoint, Prezi, a short film, a website or a talk supported by a poster. You could also use suitable and relevant music.

Step 4 Deliver your presentation.

- Make sure that you have rehearsed your presentation so that you can deliver it with confidence.
- Engage your audience by speaking slowly and clearly and making eye contact.
- Prepare for the worst by having a back-up plan in case technology lets you down.
- Finish strongly. Your presentation should finish on a high note.
- Encourage your audience to comment or ask questions at the end of the presentation.

Apply the skill

Prepare an audiovisual presentation on one or more local programs or initiatives taking place in your local area that are designed to increase the awareness of Indigenous issues and keep Indigenous culture strong.

- 1 Develop a series of questions to guide your research, such as:
 - What is the program, event or project designed to do?
 - Who is involved?
 - How has it been received?
 - How has it helped to keep Indigenous culture strong?
- 2 Conduct research and collect a range of information (such as pictures, interviews, music, videos, interviews and short quotes) and prepare your audiovisual presentation.
- 3 Present your finished product to the class.

Extend your understanding

The Australian Constitution is the founding document of Australia. It set out the rules by which the country is run. In 1901, at the time the Constitution was put in place, the land of Australia was considered to be *terra nullius* (a land belonging to no one) and because of this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were not included in discussions about the creation of the new nation on their traditional lands, nor were they included in any way in the Constitution. In recent years, many people have argued that the Constitution should be changed to recognise the first Australians. One campaign to bring out this change is called RECOGNISE.

Conduct some research on the RECOGNISE campaign (www.recognise.org.au) and answer the following questions:

- 1 What is the main goal of the RECOGNISE campaign?
- 2 Who is involved in the campaign?
- 3 Are all Australians (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in favour of the campaign? Why or why not?