

Telling our Indigenous Stories

Museums

Museums are places where we explore stories.

In the National Museum of Australia the subject of the stories is . . .

US: who we are, how we came to be that way and where we are going.

An important part of 'us' and our story is our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (or Indigenous) heritage. Whether we are Indigenous Australians, or born of ancestors from other countries, or a mixture of both, this is part of all Australians' heritage and history.

One of the galleries of the Museum, First Australians: Gallery of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, explores the stories and experiences of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

- How does it do this?
- What information and what ideas does the Museum present to us to help us appreciate and explore this part of our heritage?

That is what you will be able to explore in this unit of work.

The National Museum of Australia's First Australians Gallery



The National Museum of Australia opened in March 2001 as part of the celebrations for the Centenary of Federation. The Museum employs a fresh and exciting approach to Australia's history, culture and environment.

Each National Museum of Australia unit of work asks students to consider the stories and concepts behind Museum themes, objects and images, and is ideal for students of SOSE, History, Geography, English and Media Studies.



Click on images
to view in
large format

Curriculum Guide: Student Learning Outcomes

This unit is useful in exploring aspects of **Time, Continuity and Change**, and **Culture**. By the end of this unit students will be better able to achieve these learning outcomes:

Time, Continuity and Change

- describe and explain some lasting and changing aspects of Australian society and environments;
- critically compare representations of people, events and issues;
- explain how causes, motives and consequences may be related;
- use knowledge of the past to explore and explain contemporary events;
- critically analyse representations of people, events and issues;
- use knowledge about the past to explain contemporary events;
- explain why different individuals, groups and societies have interpreted and reinterpreted history in different ways.

Culture

- analyse the meaning of the Dreaming from a number of perspectives in Aboriginal societies;
- analyse some core values of groups and societies;
- analyse the significance to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people of the way they are connected to land or place;
- analyse contemporary issues of cultural importance from the perspectives and beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.



A museum brochure

Look at the brochure for the First Australians Gallery below. (To see the brochure in colour, look at the National Museum of Australia website www.nma.gov.au and click Education Resources, then Classroom Resources, then STUDIES Magazine and finally Telling our Indigenous Stories.)

1 Assume that this is the only information you have on the Museum's First Australians Gallery. As a class, **brainstorm** what this brochure suggests about what will be in the gallery, how it will be organised, and what messages it conveys. Does it seem like a place you would like to visit?



2 Now **brainstorm** again: what is a museum, and what should its role in society be?

How far back is 40,000 years?

One of the first things you need to do is to understand the period of time we are talking about. We do not know how long people have lived in what we now call Australia.

Indigenous oral histories speak of an occupation in Australia from time immemorial. The archaeological record is still being discovered, but it has already proven that people have been in Australia at least 40,000 years, and probably longer.

How many generations of people have lived in Australia for 40,000 years?
(Assume that a generation is 30 years, which is the Macquarie Dictionary definition.)

1 How many generations have lived in Australia since the arrival of non-Indigenous people in 1788?

Assume that each generation can be marked on a line, allowing one millimetre per generation.

2 Mark where 1788 would be on this line.



2001

3 Now work out how many generations have lived in Australia since 40,000 years BP (Before Present).

4 Mark that on the line. (You may have to extend the line, for example using a piece of string.)

Some characteristics or features of Australia's Indigenous history:

- *There are two distinct Indigenous groups in Australia — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*
- *There has always been a diversity of experiences and cultural practices among different Aboriginal groups and among different Torres Strait Islander groups.*
- *Aboriginal culture and history has always relied on oral, ceremonial and visual means for communication and passing on knowledge, rather than on written records. This differs from societies that developed and came to rely on written languages and history.*
- *Colonisation, as it occurred throughout Australia, disrupted Aboriginal societies and the transmission of their cultures. Aboriginal groups suffered cultural loss through violent encounters, introduced diseases, dislocation and the destruction of their sites.*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have survived. They are dynamic and evolving cultures.*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have continuing affiliations to 'country' that refer to land, water and sky.*

5 Taking all this into account, what would be some of the advantages and some of the disadvantages facing a museum that is trying to tell the story of Australians from earliest origins to today? Discuss your answers.

Traditional land ownership

Look at the map of Aboriginal Australia showing Indigenous language groups in Australia in 1788 on the back cover. A copy of this map is on display in the Museum.

1 When the British claimed sovereignty over Australian lands in 1770 and 1788, they did so on the legal basis of *terra nullius*, implying that there was no system of land ownership in Australia.

2 What does this map suggest to us about Indigenous Australians at the time of British colonisation and:
• borders • trade • languages • communication • rules • travel • diversity?

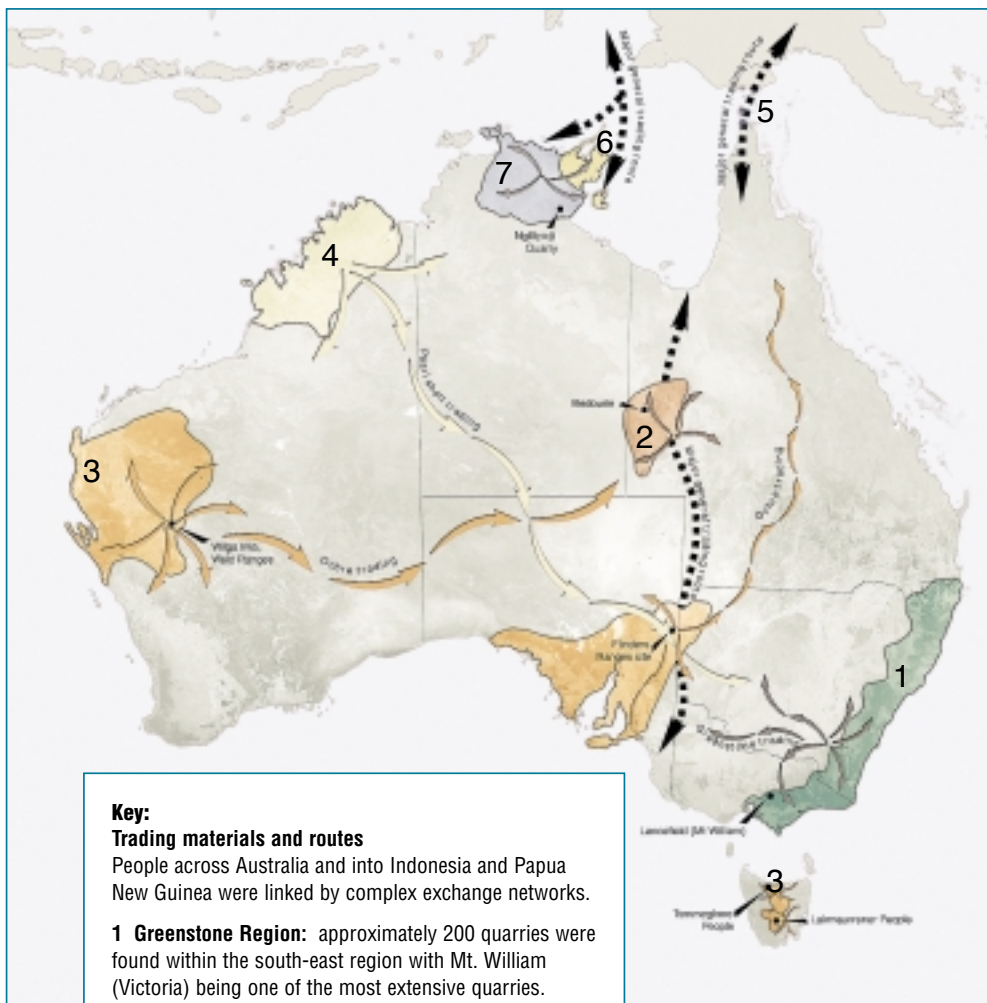
3 When and how was this legal basis of *terra nullius* challenged? (See page 15 for help.)

4 What are some of the outcomes of these decisions? (You might need to do some further research to answer this question.)

ACTIVITY 4

Trading materials and routes

Look at this map which is also on display in the Museum.



Key:

Trading materials and routes

People across Australia and into Indonesia and Papua New Guinea were linked by complex exchange networks.

1 Greenstone Region: approximately 200 quarries were found within the south-east region with Mt. William (Victoria) being one of the most extensive quarries.

2 Pituri sites: the main producers were the people from the Pita Pita and Wangkamana groups. At Bedourie, the pituri was considered to have a special ceremonial quality.

3 Ochre: one of the main sites of ochre was mined by the Adnyamathanha people in the Flinders Ranges (South Australia). Another important site for ochre was at Wilga Mia in the Weld Ranges, Western Australia, mined by the Watjarrie people. In Tasmania two main ochre sites were mined by the Tommeginne and the Lairmaurrener people.

4 Pearl shell: the major site for pearl shell was in the Kimberley region.

5 Drum: there are two types of drums Torres Strait Islanders use — the *warup*, and the cylindrical Papua New Guinean *buruburu* or *kunda* drum. The drums were traded from Papua New Guinea and stylised by the new owner in Torres Strait.

6 Canoe: the dugout canoe developed after contact with Macassan fishermen who visited the north-eastern region from the early 1600s to 1907. Other influences appear in the languages, art and culture.

7 Trade bundle: this region was one of the major areas where ceremonial exchange cycles occurred. The Ngillipidji quarry (Northern Territory) was one of the major flint spearhead quarries in this region.

1 What does the map show?

2 What does the key tell us?

3 What does the existence of trading activity suggest to us about Indigenous Australians and:

- borders
- navigation
- rules
- communication
- diversity
- languages
- co-operation
- travel
- technology
- knowledge of diverse environments?

4 It is common nowadays to acknowledge the Indigenous traditional owners of the land on which an activity is being held. For example, as you walk into the First Australians Gallery at the National Museum of Australia in Canberra, you are welcomed by the traditional owners of the land on which the gallery has been built, the Ngunnawal people.

Research

Conduct some research to find out who are the traditional owners of the land on which your school is built.

You may be able to contact a representative from this group or a local Indigenous member from your community. Invite the person to visit your school to talk about aspects of their culture and experiences they might be willing to share. For assistance, you could contact the nearest Land Council Office, the Indigenous Education Unit or Aboriginal Education Consultative body in the state or territory where you live.



Here are three pairs of images from the gallery that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from different parts of Australia in the early days of European contact.



1a

▲ A man inspecting a spear with stone blade at Ngilipitji quarry in the Northern Territory, 1935

Ngambi-stone spearheads, 1999 ▶

In this painting, the Wagilag clan demonstrate their relationship to Ngilipitji quarry. The Wagilag sisters, ancestral spirits, created this quarry and they carried stone blades from there as they travelled through eastern Arnhem Land.



1b

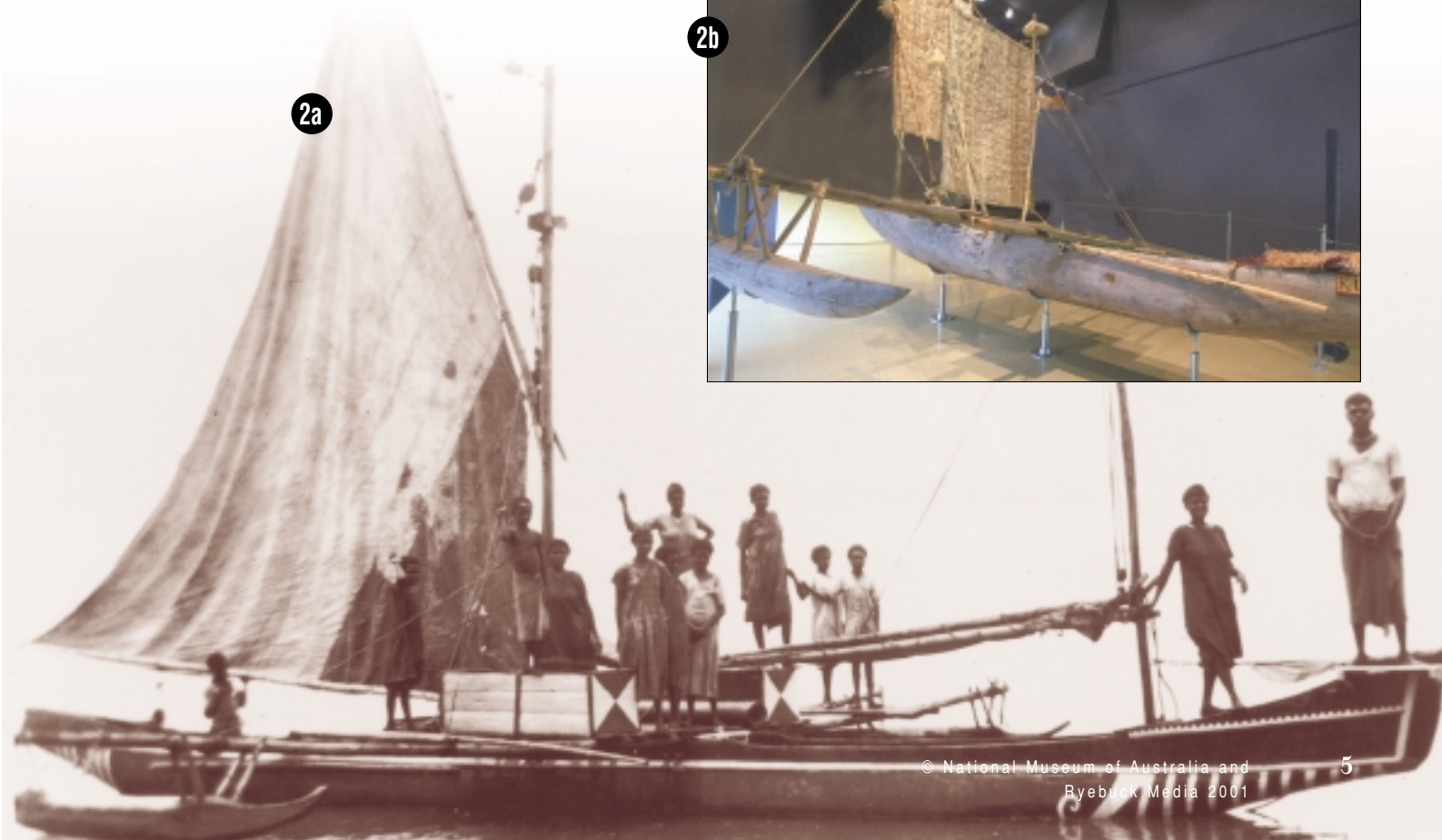
▼ Torres Strait Islander canoe, 1920s

Outrigger canoe made by the Saibai Island community, 2000 ▶

2b



2a



Shield, bone tool, club and basket from south-eastern South Australia ►



George French Angas, an artist made these images of the material culture of Aboriginal people he met in south-eastern South Australia. These were published in 1847.



- 1
- Match the places marked on the outline map of Australia above with each set of images 1 to 3.
- 2
- List the similarities and the differences between each of the pairs of images, using a table like this.

Similarities	Differences

- 3
- Take any one of the pairs of images, and discuss ways in which the people shown seem to be using the environment successfully.
- 4
- What do the activities in these images suggest to you about:
 - diversity
 - navigation
 - technology
 - stories
 - knowledge of environment?
- 5
- The pages you have just been investigating do not have a heading.

Here are some possible headings. Choose which one is most appropriate for this section, and write it at the top of page 5.

- Technology
- Living cultures
- Relationships to the land
- Diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Your conclusion

We said at the start of this unit that the National Museum of Australia exists to help us explore our history.

What aspect of Australians’ story are the displays reproduced in Activity 5 telling us?

Write one or two sentences that summarise the part of the story being represented here.

ACTIVITY 6

Your heading

Here are some photographs of exhibits from the First Australians Gallery exploring aspects of Aboriginal culture.

1 Look at this object.

- What could it be?
- What might it be used for?



2 Look at the photograph below and now suggest the purpose of the object.



Frank Gurrmanamana
using a fishtrap in
the tidal creek at
Gunadjanga, 1973

3 Now look at the three images and *Spirits that shape the land* on the next page.

SPIRITS THAT SHAPE THE LAND

The Anbarra believe their land contains the spirits of the beings who created its features in the time before living memory. These beings are *wangarr*. They have many forms – human, animal and plant. Less commonly, they take the shape of cultural objects such as a painted coffin or a woven fishtrap. Through painting, dance and song the Anbarra invoke the presence of *wangarr*.



Betty and Elva making the fishtrap with the words spoken by their father Frank Gurrmanamana, 'Fishtrap gave these places to us.'

4 When is a fishtrap not just an object for catching fish?

5 How do these images and text help us to begin to understand and appreciate the significance of the object to this group of Aboriginal people?

6 What do these activities suggest about:

- Where the Aboriginal group might live
- Ceremonies
- Stories
- Affiliation to sites
- Relationship with the environment
- Connection to the land
- Religion

7 What is this story telling us?

8 Is it telling us the whole story or only a part of the story?

9 Does your family have an object that represents a significant event or story?



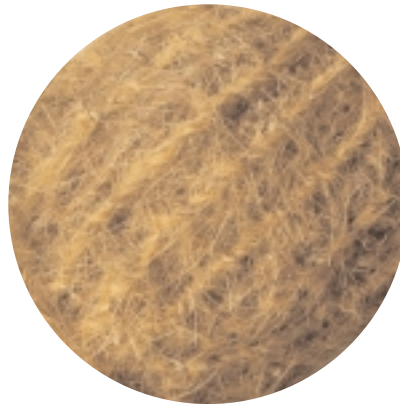
Frank Gurrmanamana with the completed fishtrap, 2000. The fishtrap is woven from the jungle vine mirlarl.



Betty identifies placenames at the clan estate of Djunawunya. Betty's father is Frank Gurrmanamana. He mapped these places with anthropologist Les Hiatt in 1958.



*Hatchet, about 1930
Oenpelli, Northern Territory*



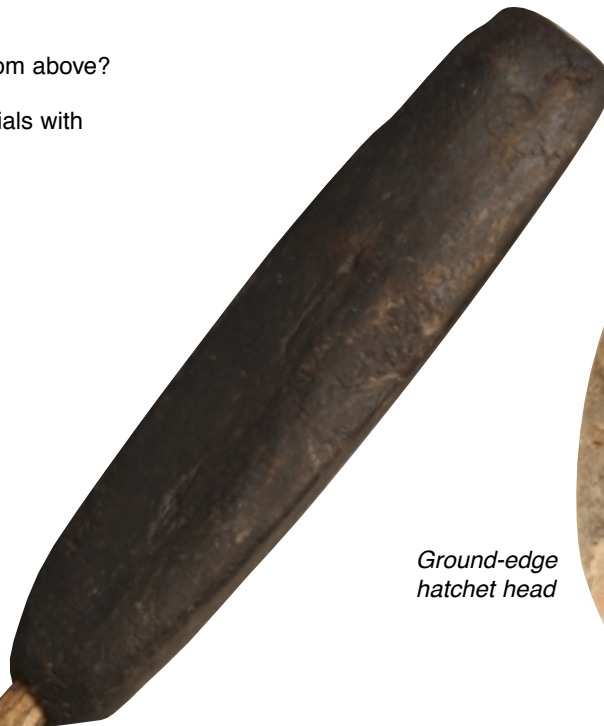
Human hair string

Part of the *First Australian's Gallery* show how Aboriginal people used stone to make hatchet heads. Hatchets were used for getting food, preparing food, preparing animal skins, making canoes, spears and much more.

10 Look at the image of a hatchet and some of the materials it consists of.

11 What is the missing material from above?

12 Draw a line to match the materials with the processes in the table.



Beeswax



*Ground-edge
hatchet head*

Materials required	Processes
Stone slab	Mould beeswax
Timber	Collect and cut suitable timber for handle
Grinding stone	Collect human hair or plant fibres
Beeswax	Heat the timber to fold it
String/fibres	Shape the stone using percussion flaking
Fire (low heat)	Wrap handle around head
Hammerstone	Form string from human hair or plant fibres
	Collect beeswax
	Create the edge
	Shape the timber
	Collect or trade for best stone
	Mould beeswax where head joins handle
	Make fire and use a low heat to soften the beeswax

10 Fill in the grid below to match the appropriate materials and processes with each stage in the manufacturing of the hatchet.

Stage	Materials	Processes
Make the head		
Make the shaft		
Join them together		

11 The final product was a very valuable stone tool. What detailed knowledge did Aboriginal people need to use their technology to make a hatchet?

12 Steel hatchets that were distributed by Europeans to Aboriginal people soon became accessible to other Aboriginal groups through their far-reaching networks of trade.

What benefits would the steel hatchet have brought to Aboriginal people?

Speculate on what impacts the introduced steel hatchet might have had on the fabric of Aboriginal societies.

13 What questions or issues does this display in the Museum raise about Aboriginal cultures?

14 The pages you have just been using do not have a heading.

Here are some possible headings. Choose which one is most appropriate for this section and write it in at the top of page 7.

- Aboriginal cultures
- Knowledge of the environment
- Diversity
- Stories and meanings
- Technology
- Relationship with the environment

15 Using the trade map in this unit (page 4), identify the nearest stone quarry site to where you live.

Your conclusion

We said at the start of this unit that the National Museum of Australia exists to help us explore our history.

What aspect of Australians' story are the displays reproduced in Activity 6 telling us?

Write one or two sentences that summarise the part of the story being represented here.

ACTIVITY 7



Your heading

One of the major emphases of the First Australians Gallery is to explore some of the impacts which resulted from the contact between Indigenous Australians and European settlers.

The exhibits are organised around the major theme 'Negotiating Co-existence', and are arranged into four modules:

- 'To conciliate their affections'
- Fighting for the land
- Managing our lives — an Aboriginal mission experience
- Fighting for our rights.

1 What do you think 'negotiating co-existence' means?

Group work

Imagine that you are on a tour of the gallery.

You see and are particularly struck by the exhibits on the next pages. **Your task** is to decide what those objects are, what meanings or ideas or understandings they are providing you with, and what is the overall story they are telling.

2 In your group distribute the four sets of displays among you.

3 For each display, fill in the middle column of the table for the images shown.

4 Now look carefully at the Background Briefing section again, and identify which aspect or aspects of the story the display items represent or illustrate. Record this in the right-hand column in each case.

5 Imagine that one of the objects or images in your display is on loan, and has to be returned. However, the curators of the Museum do not want to change the display too much — so they will replace the removed object with another one. They see you taking a great interest in the display, and ask you to recommend what a suitable replacement exhibit might be. Decide what you would advise them. You may recommend an exhibit which tells a similar part of the story to the one that has been removed, OR you may decide that part of the story is not well represented by the existing exhibits, and you recommend something that fills in this gap. (You may also have to do a bit of research on the theme of the display to come up with the best possible suggestions.) When you are ready fill in the final row describing your choice and why you think it would be suitable.

6 In your group, share your ideas and describe the exhibits you have chosen.

7 Activity 7 does not have a heading.

Here are some possible headings. Choose which one is most appropriate for this section, and write it in at the top of this page.

- Impacts of European settlement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples since European settlement
- Co-operation and conflict since European settlement

8 From your research and discussions, decide if you think the story being presented by the Museum, or their representation of history, is a fair, balanced and accurate one.

Your conclusion



We said at the start of this unit that the National Museum of Australia exists to help us explore our history. What aspect of Australians' story are the displays reproduced in Activity 7 telling us?

9 Look at the reproduction of the brochure on page 2. As a group, pool your ideas, information and understandings to design your own brochure or poster for the First Australians Gallery. You should include some images, and words that you think accurately prepares people for what they will see — maximum of 150 words. Write one or two sentences that summarise the story being told.

10 Imagine that the year is 2101. The National Museum of Australia is 100 years old. A new wing is to be added celebrating the last century. As curator, you have been asked to choose some objects and images and provide information to present the events and stories of Indigenous Australians.

You might even like to send your results to the Museum:

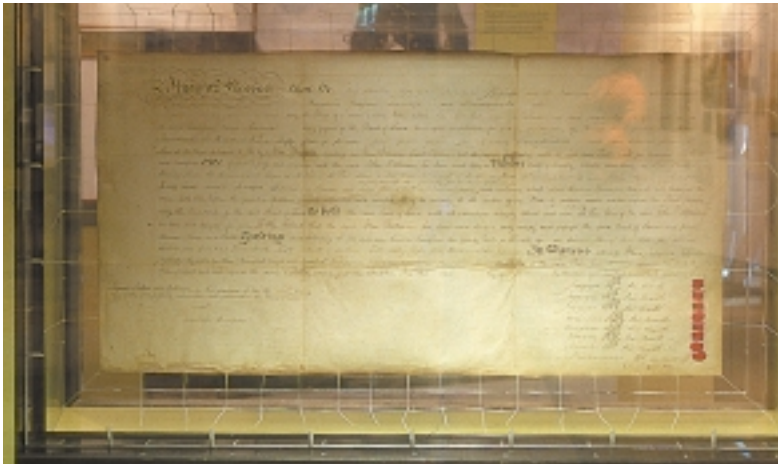
National Museum of Australia
Schools Program Section
GPO Box 1901
Canberra ACT 2601

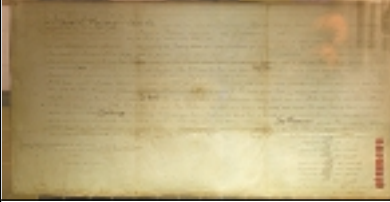
'To conciliate their affections'

Background Briefing

In 1788 the First Fleet landed and Governor Arthur Phillip declared that the British Crown had sovereignty over Australian lands. The early governors were given instructions to treat the Aboriginal people fairly and justly. However, Aboriginal rights to land were not recognised, and in practise, they were not given the same rights as British settlers.

The aim of this part of the First Australians Gallery is to show some of the processes of negotiating co-existence between the British settlers and Aboriginal people, including examples of co-operation and conflict.



Object / image	What it is / what it shows	Its meanings / messages
An early colonial wooden poster from Tasmania created to illustrate to Aboriginal people and Europeans the consequences of breaking laws 		
A copy of a land deed signed by John Batman and with the 'marks' of several Victorian Aboriginal men, 1835. This land deed was disallowed by the British Government 		
Your choice of an exhibit and brief explanatory caption		

Fighting for the land

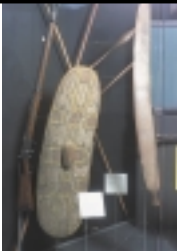
Background Briefing

Due to competition for land and resources, contact between Aboriginal people and the British invaders often resulted in violent conflicts. Pressure from humanitarians in Britain led to concern about the protection of Aboriginal people in the colonies.

Despite Aboriginal peoples' superior knowledge of the environment and effective weaponry, they were overwhelmed by the settlers' technology and diseases to which they had little resistance. Such factors took a heavy toll on the Aboriginal population.

The aim of this part of the First Australians Gallery is to illustrate how Aboriginal people resisted the invasion of their lands.



Object / image	What it is / what it shows	Its meanings / messages
<i>Contrasting weapons: rifle versus shield, fighting spears and club sword</i> 		
<i>Chains and D shackle, about 1890. In parts of Western Australia police used shackles, hand manacles and neck chains to restrain groups of Aboriginal prisoners and march them to regional centres for trial</i> 		
<i>Your choice of an exhibit and brief explanatory caption</i>		

Managing our lives *an Aboriginal mission experience*

Background Briefing

Since colonisation, Aboriginal peoples' lives have been controlled and managed by governments and Christian organisations through missions, reserves, stations and children's homes.

Many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been affected by forcible removal. This included taking children by force and separating them from their family and culture. The *Bringing Them Home* Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from

Their Families in April 1997 highlighted cases of personal anguish and cultural deprivation among removed children.

The aim of this part of the First Australians Gallery is to illustrate how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives were managed by government and other organisations.



Object / image	What it is / what it shows	Its meanings / messages
<i>Reconstruction of the front gate of the Bomaderry (NSW) Children's Home. Many children were taken from their parents and only educated to minimum levels at the children's home</i> 		
<i>A reconstructed slab hut used by Aboriginal people at Framlingham Mission in Victoria, 2000</i>  <i>Herbie Harradine A cultural heritage officer at Framlingham today 'I feel that my job is important because I'm protecting sites and looking after them for future generations to be proud of. But I wouldn't be able to do my job without the elders from the community.'</i>		
<i>Your choice of an exhibit and brief explanatory caption</i>		

Fighting for our rights

Background Briefing

In 1992, the High Court of Australia overturned the concept of *terra nullius*, 'belonging to no-one.' The landmark Mabo Case restored Native Title. In 1996, the Wik decision extended Native Title to apply to pastoral leases. Native Title has now been enshrined in Commonwealth legislation and is called the Native Title Act.

But Native Title is as much concerned with the exercise of traditional rights on land as its ownership. Many Indigenous Australians have not and can not gain anything from Native Title laws. Due to colonisation, many Indigenous Australians were forced to leave their lands and it is difficult for them to prove the ongoing association with their lands required by the Native Title Act.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to fight for equal rights and opportunities. They demand an apology for past injustices, greater control over their lives, land rights, compensation and improved social and economic conditions.

Not all Indigenous Australians agree on all these issues. As with other Australians, Indigenous Australians have differing views on political and social issues, including the way in which their future should be shaped.



Object / image	What it is / what it shows	Its meanings / messages
A Wik woman, Gladys Tybingoompa, celebrating the High Court's decision in 1996 to allow Native Title on pastoral leases 		
Prime Minister Whitlam pours soil into the hands of Vincent Lingiari to symbolise the return of land to the Gurindji people in 1975 		
Your choice of an exhibit and brief explanatory caption		

ACTIVITY 8

Knowledge and ideas raised by Museum objects or images

On page 1 we asked what Information and ideas are raised in this unit about Australia's Indigenous history.

1 Taking into account all the exhibits that you have now studied in this unit decide which of these, if any, helps to illustrate each aspect of the Indigenous story listed in the first column of the table below. List these objects or images in the second column. In the third column, explain the main ideas or

messages that you believe are raised by that object or image in each case.

2 Imagine that you had to write a short description of the First Australians Gallery to go with the brochure on page 2. What would you write?

Aspect	Best exhibit/s related to it	Your explanation of the main ideas / messages presented by that exhibits
Christianity		
Conflict		
Continuity		
Controls		
Co-operation		
Country		
Cultures		
Daily life		
Diversity		
Family		
Human rights		
Land rights		
Resistance		
The future		
Trade		





NATIONAL
MUSEUM OF
AUSTRALIA

YESTERDAY

our culture

First Australians: A Journey Through Time

First Australians

gallery

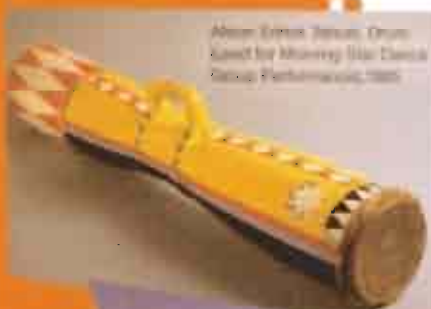




Shilong, Timothy
Chief of Marindam
Awarded to Victor Bruce 1940



Shilong, Timothy
Chief of Marindam
Awarded to Victor Bruce 1940



Allen, Ernest, Jellison, Drum
Awarded to Murray Hill, 1985
Group Performance 1985



Shilong, Timothy
Chief of Marindam
Awarded to Victor Bruce 1940



Shilong, Timothy
Chief of Marindam
Awarded to Victor Bruce 1940

The First Australians gallery

explores the history of Australia and its colonisation through the experiences, stories and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visitors are introduced to the two distinct Indigenous groups in Australia and experience an extraordinary range in language, culture, spirituality and identity.

You will meet communities as diverse as the Anbama in the remote north (Arnhem Land) and the Palawa to the south (Tasmania) – from Framlingham in Victoria to Broome in Western Australia.

Have a visual impact in the unique Welcome space where you activate stunning effects on the sound and vision projections of six Indigenous dancers. In Open Collections, marvel at a selection of over 1,000 treasures from our vast 120,000-strong national holdings. Enter a 1930s bark hut constructed in the 'Mission' exhibition, and walk around the outrigger canoe in a gallery dedicated to the display of Torres Strait Island culture.

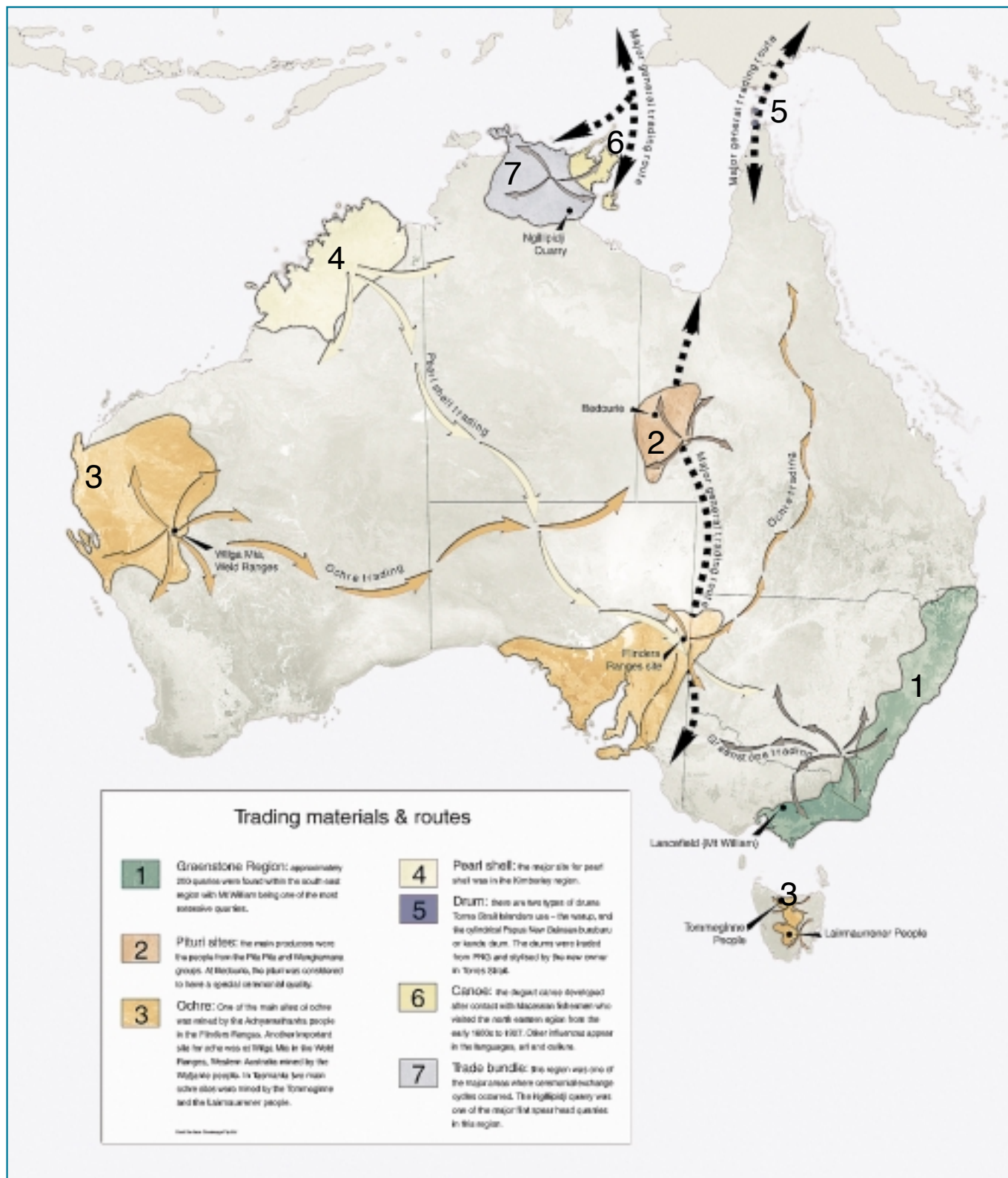
An ancient past shown alongside the dynamic present tells the story of a continuous and eventful history.

National Museum of Australia

Acton Peninsula ACTON CANBERRA 2601

Telephone: 02 6206 5000 Fax: 02 6206 5148

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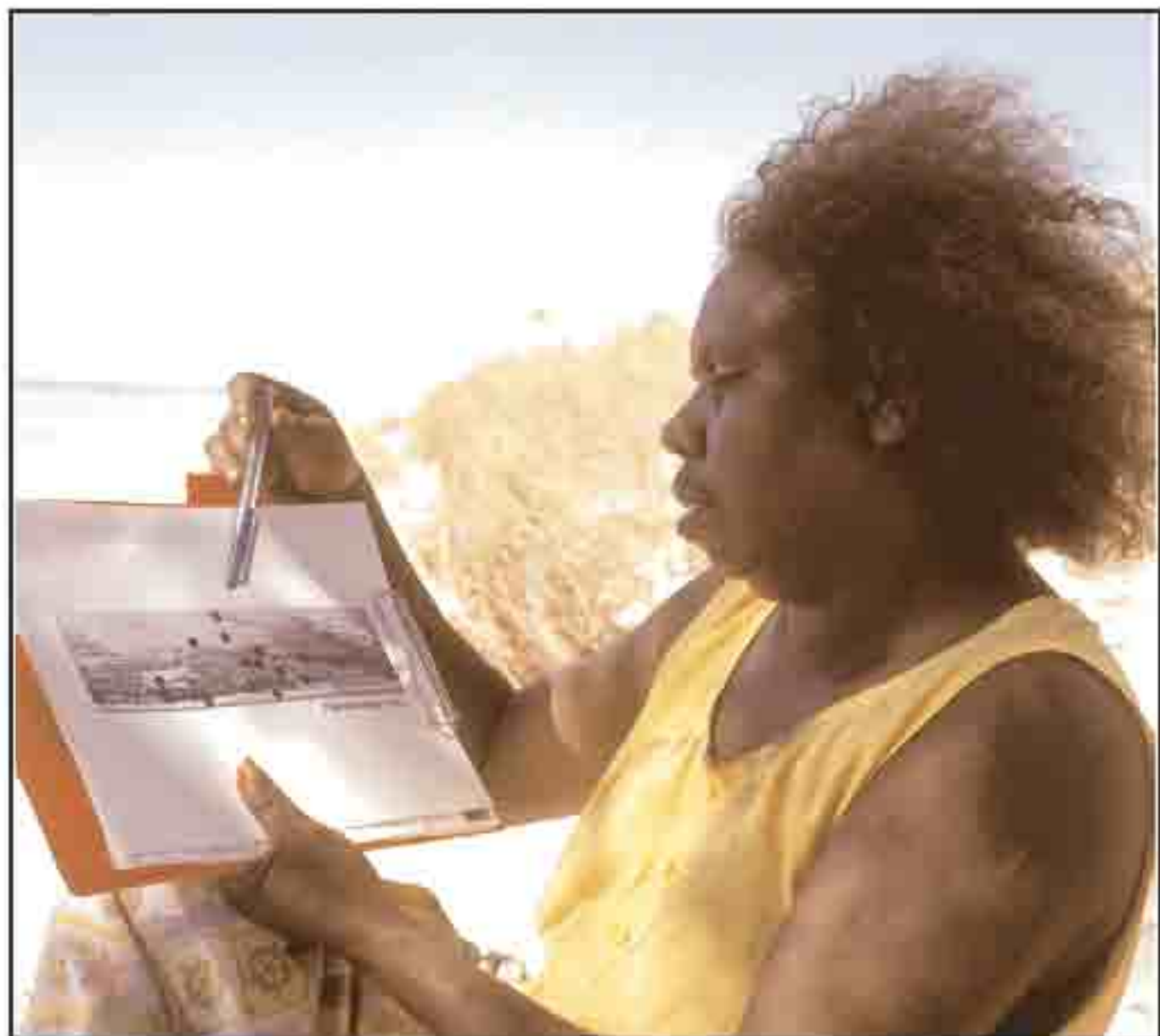




*Fishtrap gave
these places to us.*



Frank Gurrmanamana











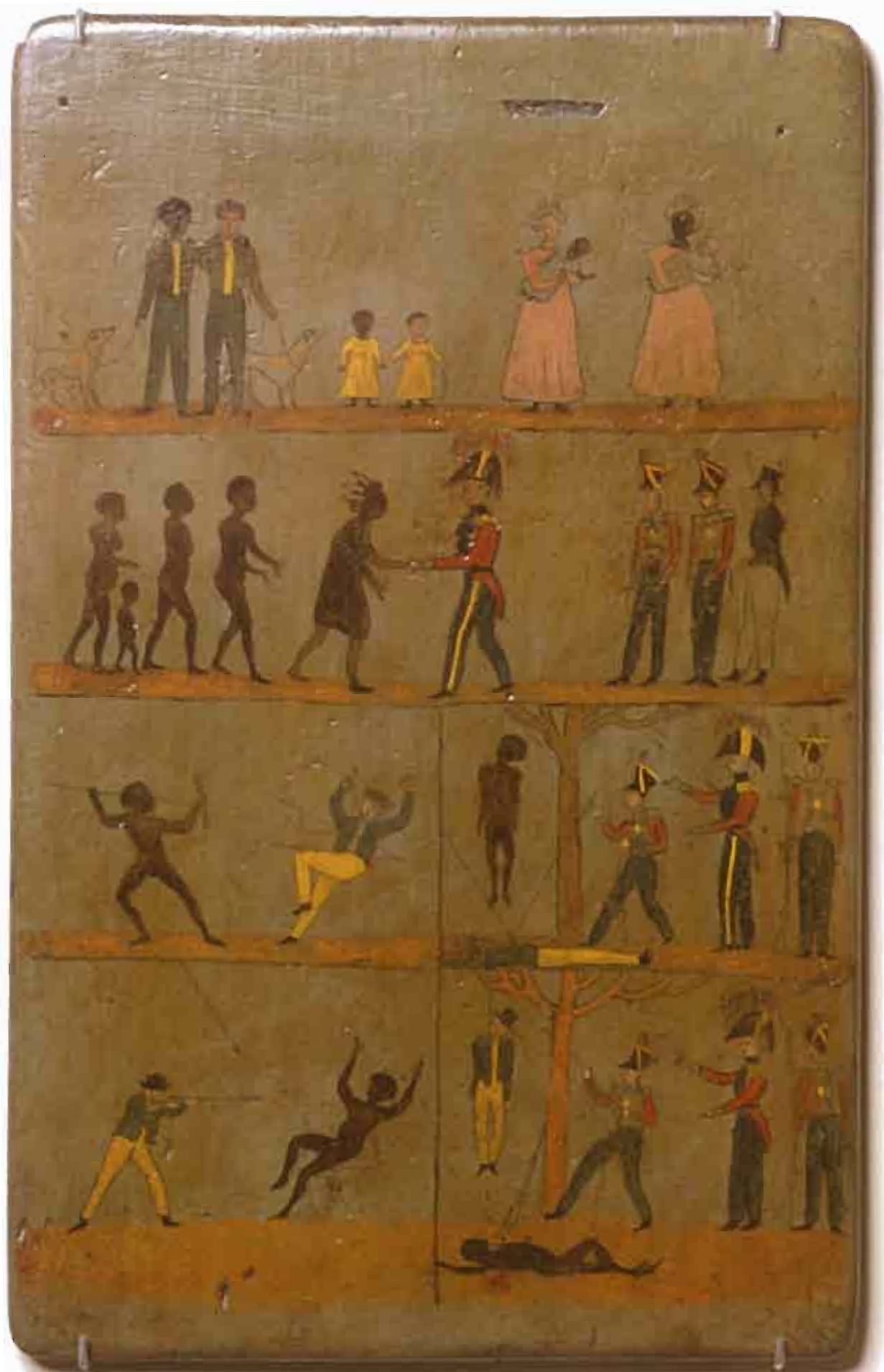
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Bringing them home

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families







