

First Knowledges for younger readers

Design & Building on Country

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Synopsis

Design & Building on Country shares thousands of years of First Nations history and culture, highlighting for young readers what Country has offered generations of First Nations people and continues to offer in all aspects of life.

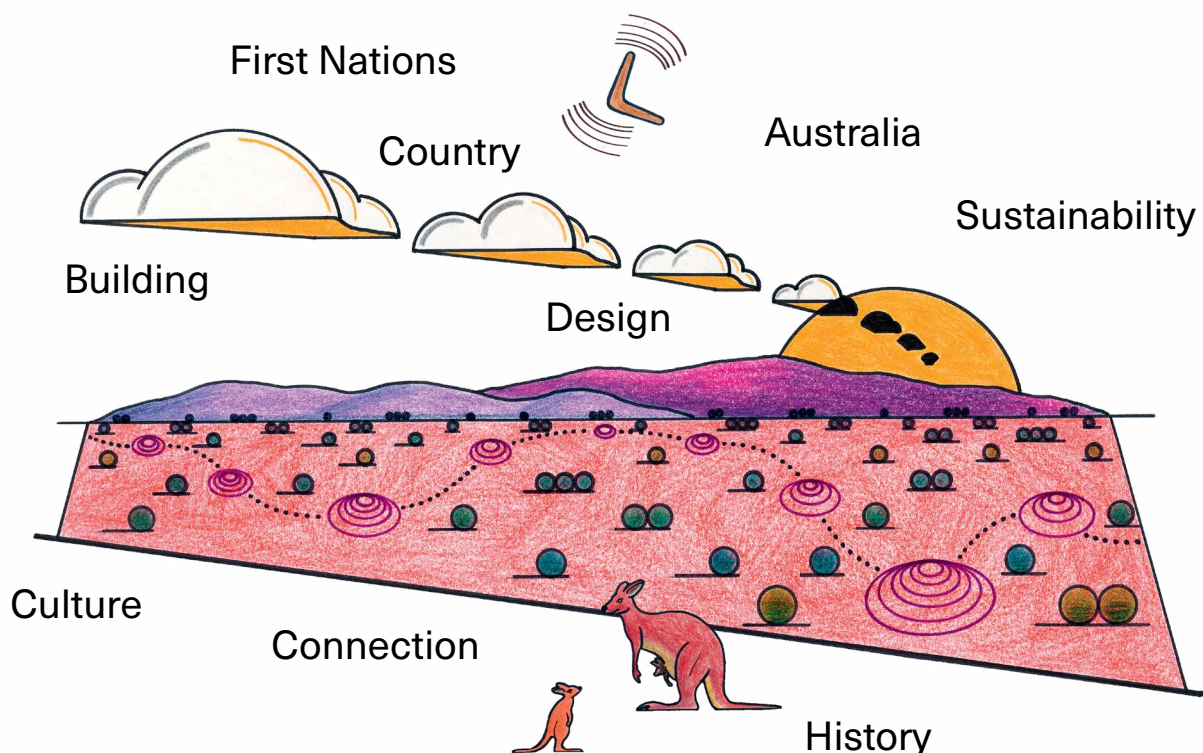
This book offers a journey through the generous storytelling of First Nations people to share how they cared for and worked with Country to live in harmony. Aboriginal people were the first cooks, engineers and designers of this vast continent and this book shares how they designed and built in their environment, from fish traps to ovens, from homes to fashion.

Readers will learn how Aboriginal peoples' cultures and ancient knowledges can be used today and into the future to create a better, healthier global community.

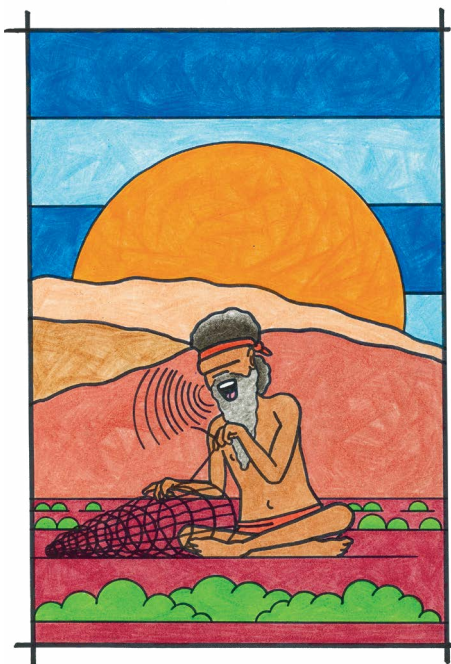
Writing style

Design & Building on Country is shared in informative yet accessible language by two authors: Professor Paul Memmott AO is an anthropologist and architect and Alison Page is a descendant of the Walbanga and Wadi Wadi people of the Dharawal and Yuin Nations and an award-winning artist. Together they draw on their areas of expertise to explain and share examples from First Nations peoples all over Australia.

Themes



STUDY NOTES



p. 17 Ceremony and song

CHAPTER 1

Objects and Country

- Before opening the book, reflecting on the title itself, ask your class what they think they will be learning from this book.
- Does your classroom have the map of all the Aboriginal Nations throughout Australia? Put one up if you don't. Find out what Country your school is built on and research as a class how you can take responsibility for caring for Country.
- How are you connected to Country? You can all strengthen your connection by going and sitting on Country. Take your class outside, close your eyes or bow your head, listen to and feel what Country is telling you.
- Invite a local Elder or respected community member in to share the local creation and Dreaming stories with your class or school.



p. 31 The organic hardware store

CHAPTER 2

First Nations' materials and spirituality

- Share what you know about lifecycles as a class in a yarning circle. Think about how natural objects on Country used for shelters, food, string and ropes, tools and medicines have a lifecycle of their own.
- For thousands and thousands of years Aboriginal people have practised sustainability when caring for Country. Think about how best to practise sustainability in your school? Research ways you can improve sustainability in your school and classrooms.
- What are your local First Nations seasons? Learn and celebrate them as a class throughout the year. Think about what Country is telling you through the year.
- Traditional Aboriginal housing designs, using bark and spinifex, were so effective they were used by some colonists. In a yarning circle discuss your thoughts on the 'Organic Hardware store' (page 30). How could we benefit from one of these today?
- Learn more about the Lardil people from Wellesley Island. Share their skills and story with your school community.

Tools for living on Country

- The kinship systems of Aboriginal people are complex and mathematical. Here is a guide to help explain Aboriginal kinship systems:

<https://www.watarrkafoundation.org.au/blog/the-role-of-family-kinship-in-aboriginal-culture>

- Share the differences between western and Aboriginal kinship systems, highlighting how objects and Country are a part of Aboriginal kinship systems.
- Trade routes along the Songlines of Aboriginal people have been active for thousands and thousands of years. Highlight the different trade stories in chapter 3 with your class using a First Nations map. Can you all find more trade routes and stories to mark on your class map?
- As a class, consider what benefits colonisers' new tools and materials brought to Aboriginal people and how and why did they adapted them. Ask your class, in what way have these materials damaged Country and the culture of Aboriginal people and all Australians today? Brainstorm what can be done with modern materials instead of throwing them away into landfill.
- Research how communities around Australia are bringing objects and people home to Country through repatriation programs. In groups, have students highlight a story that resonates with them to share with the year level or school community.



CHAPTER 4

Kitchen on Country



- Have your class research the difference between Dreaming and Dreamtime. Learn more about how Dreaming and Dreamtime stories help Aboriginal people in their daily lives:

theconversation.com/dreamtime-and-the-dreaming-an-introduction-20833

- What are some local bush foods that grow on the Country your school is built on? Can the class grow an indigenous garden to share with your school community or in your canteen?
- Message sticks carried the information from one Nation to another that a ceremony or feast was to take place and when to come. Explore message sticks further and learn their importance. You may choose to send one to another class.
- Explore the UNESCO World heritage listed Budj Bim traps of the Gunditjmara people and how they would prepare for the cold winters ahead by storing food:
nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/budj-bim-cultural-landscape
- Learn how Aboriginal people grind seeds and prepare the bread for the community. Use this information to cook some damper from scratch.

CHAPTER 5

The first engineers on Country

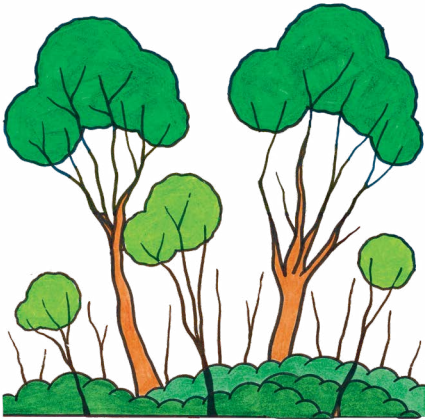
- The returning boomerang is known as the world's earliest aerofoil. What is an aerofoil? Make an aerofoil with your class to learn the science behind the boomerang:

[youtube.com/watch?v=SDwBgm2DQN0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDwBgm2DQN0)



- Invite an Aboriginal community member who can throw a boomerang to your school to demonstrate the science behind boomerangs firsthand. See if they have any tips!
- Sustainability and regeneration of land was essential for Aboriginal landcare systems so species could remain healthy and plentiful for thousands of years. This often involved reconstructing the landscape. Explore examples, such as the Wellesley Island rock walls that were used to trap fish.
- Nets have been utilised by Aboriginal people for thousands and thousands of years. Have your students create dioramas showcasing the different uses of nets and other technologies to collect and capture food:

aiatsis.gov.au/explore/fishing



CHAPTER 6

Setting up on camp

- Setting up a camp depended on the part of Country Aboriginal people were camping on. Camps had sophisticated layouts so everyone knew their relationship to other people and felt safe. In groups, have students create a map for a school campsite that would make everyone feel that same way.
- How do wind breaks protect people when they are built on a campsite? Research some examples of windbreaks in modern architecture.
- Learn more about the science behind windbreaks. In groups, students can try to build mini windbreaks out of local materials to test them. From the knowledge they gain testing the mini windbreaks, come together as a class to build a large-scale windbreak in the school yard that would keep you safe from the elements.



CHAPTER 7

Building a shelter

- In small groups, have the class investigate different shelters and why they were used by Aboriginal people before and during colonisation, then create a display for others to learn about the sophisticated technology used.
- Aboriginal people have long understood the benefits of many plants and fibres. Today modern society is starting to realise the worth in this knowledge and spinifex grass is beginning to be used in medical gels. Investigate this further with your class:

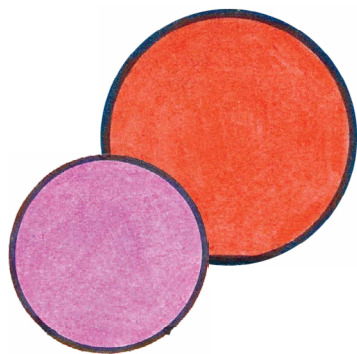
abc.net.au/news/2023-03-08/spinifex-grass-could-treat-arthritis-create-indigenous-jobs/102050068

- Look at the illustration on page 106–7 of the family living in the spinifex home. Ask the class to think about the ideas they might previously have had about how some Aboriginal people lived prior to colonisation. Has anything changed in their minds?



p. 106–7 Spinifex home

- Reread the quote from Captain Cook on page 108–9 about Aboriginal people being the happiest people he had ever witnessed because the land and sea provided everything they would ever need. Ask your students, how does that make them feel about how Aboriginal people and Country have been treated, from colonisation until now?



CHAPTER 8

Aboriginal architecture today

- Ask your class if and why they think it is important to celebrate the stories of the old people that walked before them. Have them think of some questions to ask an older person in their community.
- Research Barangaroo and then have students write a poem celebrating her and the plight of her people and Country. Discuss together if you think Barangaroo would be proud of the suburb being named after her.
- Aboriginal people have been ignored for generations by colonisers. Alison's story of the hospital built in Wilcannia on page 123 is a solid example of what listening and bringing together traditional knowledges and Western technology can do for a community. Have your students write a reflection of how you felt learning about these changes and another situation where it could be applied.

CHAPTER 9

Design futures

- Celebrating Aboriginal peoples' culture and connection to Country has not always been the way. In a yarning circle, ask students to think of any examples they might have seen recently that lift and celebrate artists in the community.
- How would you all like to see Country and Aboriginal culture celebrated in your classroom or at home? Ask your class what First Nations design or products they would like to see in the future.
- Have your class write a reflection on what they would like to share from this book with their family and community to ensure we have a future full of connection to the oldest living surviving culture in the world.



p. 120 Rethinking Aboriginal housing



p. 132–3 Design futures