

Introducing Indigenous Australian cultures

First people

The word *Aborigine* means "from the beginning". White European **settlers** used this word to describe the **indigenous** people of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands, off the coast of Queensland. Indigenous Australians probably came to Australia from South-East Asia about 50,000 to 60,000 years ago, but Indigenous Australian people believe that they have always lived in Australia, and that their **spirit ancestors** created them.

Europeans settled in Australia in 1788. There have been problems between the two groups of people over time.

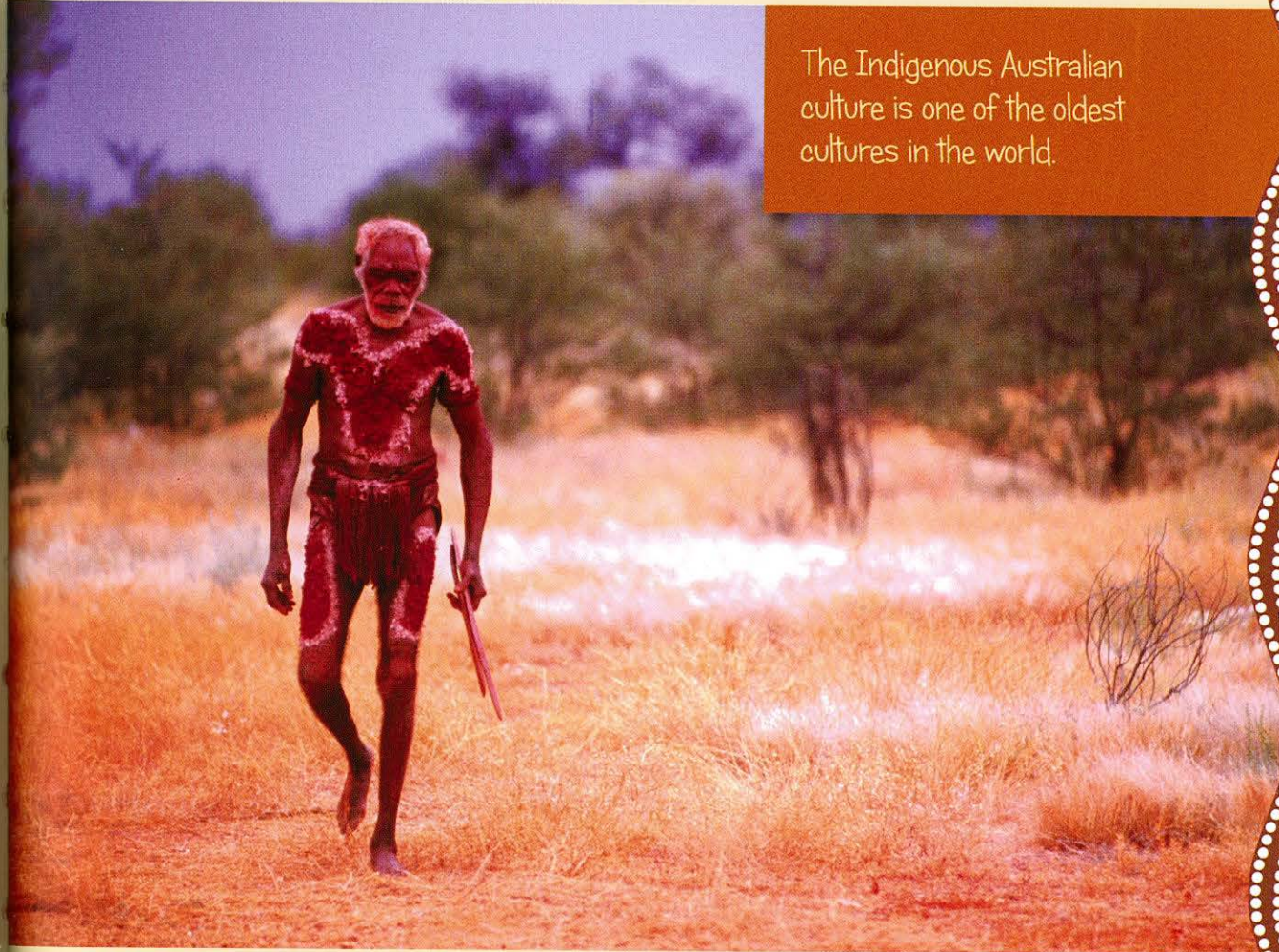
Today, there are 550,000 Indigenous Australians. They make up about 1 per cent of Australia's population. Each different indigenous group is called a nation. Some nations are very small, while others include hundreds of people.

Did you know?

Indigenous Australian people do not always use the word *Aborigine* to describe themselves. They may also use words like *Koori*, *Murri* and *Nyungar*.

What is culture?

Culture is something a group of people shares. This can be shared history, religion, beliefs, art, music and songs. The Indigenous Australian culture has developed over thousands of years.



The Indigenous Australian culture is one of the oldest cultures in the world.

word bank

indigenous first people to live in a country or region

settler person who moves to a new country to live there

spirit ancestors beings that Indigenous Australians believe created the world and everything in it.

Beliefs and festivals

Indigenous Australians call the beginning of the world the "Dreamtime". Their stories, art and music explain different parts of the Dreamtime. Stories include why fish swim and how the different spirit ancestors created the land. Sharing stories and music is a way of passing these beliefs from parents to children and grandchildren.

In the beginning

Most indigenous people believe that in the beginning the world had no mountains, rocks or rivers. They believe that spirit ancestors came out of the ground and began to shape the landscape as they moved around.

This sand painting was made by the Ipolera people of central Australia.

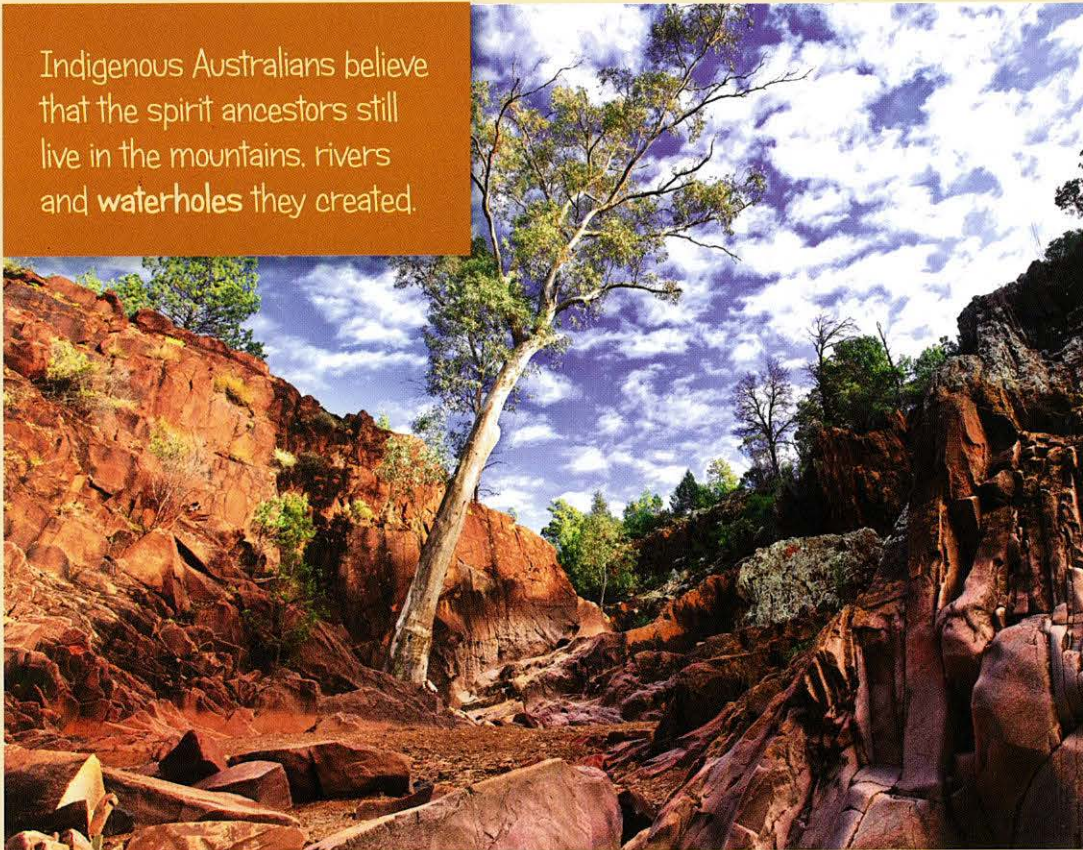


For example, a mountain may be the fallen body of a spirit ancestor. Indigenous Australians believe that some of these ancestors gave birth to humans.

Did you know?

Indigenous Australians find their way across the land using **songlines**. They believe that spirit ancestors sang out the names of everything that crossed their path, creating invisible tracks across the country. By singing the ancestors' songs today, Indigenous Australians can find their way around.

Indigenous Australians believe that the spirit ancestors still live in the mountains, rivers and **waterholes** they created.



word bank

songlines invisible tracks on the land left by the songs of spirit ancestors

waterhole hole in the ground where water collects

Spirit ancestors

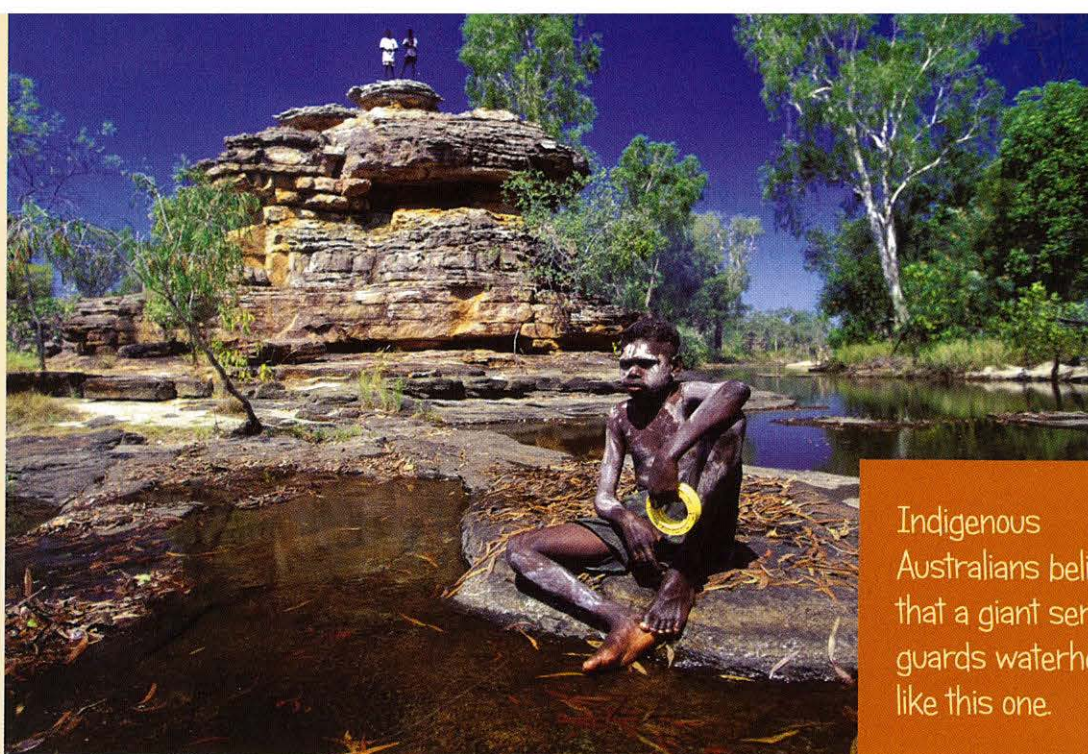
Each Indigenous Australian nation believes in different spirit ancestors. They can be humans, animals, trees, rocks or stars. Every person also believes in their own spirit ancestor that they came from and are connected to. Indigenous Australians believe that most of the spirit ancestors are good. However, there are also some very nasty ones.

Did you know?

Indigenous Australian nations near Laura in Queensland believe the Anurra spirit can bounce nearly 1 km (0.6 miles) in one hop. They believe that the Anurra lives on frogs and has large ears.

This rock painting in Kakada National Park shows Barrginj, a spirit ancestor.





Indigenous Australians believe that a giant serpent guards waterholes like this one.

The Quinkan

The Quinkan spirit is believed to live in the rocks near Jowalbinna in Queensland. The Quinkan has two sides to him – one good and one bad. The bad Quinkan is big, fat and scary, and does all kinds of mischief. To keep the Quinkan happy, Indigenous Australians believe that he should not be disturbed, so there are Quinkan **reserves** and areas that only indigenous people can enter.

Did you know?

The *Bunyip* is a frightening creature that is believed to lurk in ponds and streams. Most indigenous nations think it is an evil spirit and have different names for it, such as *dongu* and *wowie-wowie*.

word bank

Bunyip, dongu, wowie-wowie all names for a frightening creature that lives in water

reserve area of land that is not open to everyone

Sacred sites and ceremonies

Each Indigenous Australian nation has its own **sacred** places. They believe that the spirit ancestors came out of the ground and still live in these places.

Indigenous Australians hold **ceremonies** to keep in touch with spirit ancestors. There are special ceremonies for birth, marriage and death. At funerals, a special plant is burned in a smoking ceremony. Indigenous Australians believe that this will heal their sadness. When someone dies, family members call out to the spirit ancestors to make sure that a person's spirit will rejoin the spirit world.

Uluru is a sacred site for the Pitjantjatjara and the Yankunytjatjara peoples.



Young People

A *bora* is a ceremony in which teenage boys become men. The boys are called *kippas*, and they learn songs, dances and **traditional** stories to perform at the ceremony. They also decorate themselves with paint for their performance.

Tjurunga

Tjurunga (sometimes called *churinga*) are important religious objects and songs for some nations, such as the Arrernte. *Tjurunga* might be sacred hills where ceremonies take place, or stone or wooden objects. In Arrernte ceremonies, the Indigenous Australians paint religious art on the ground and sing sacred songs.

word bank

ceremony celebration held for a special or important event

sacred something that is connected to religion and is worshipped

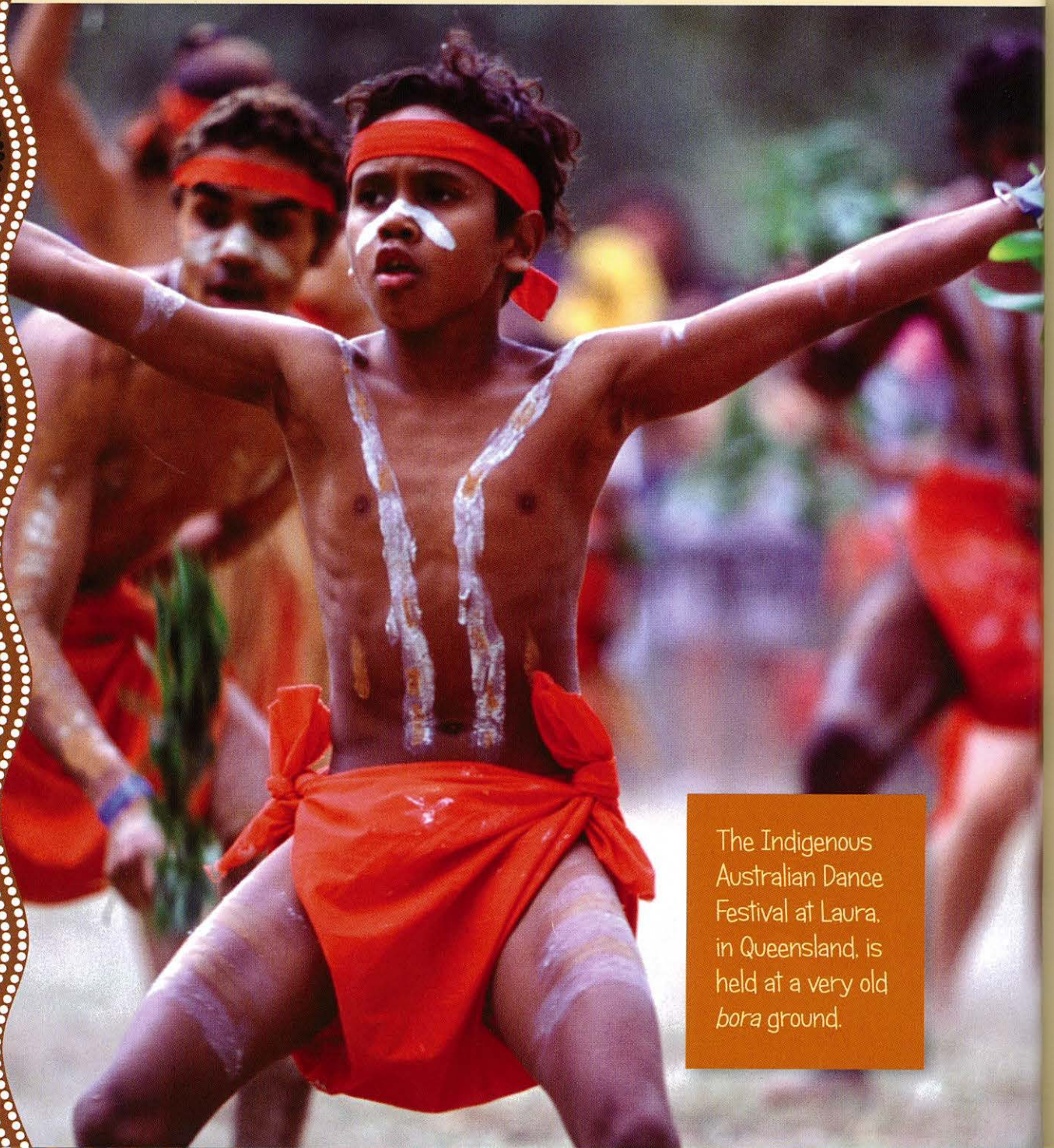
traditional stories, songs or dances that are passed down from one generation to the next



This photo shows a *bora* ceremony from the film *Yolngu Boy* (2001).

Festivals and traditions

All over Australia, there are festivals to celebrate Indigenous Australian cultures. These festivals help to keep indigenous cultures alive and pass them on to the next generation. Everybody is welcome to attend the festival and see the crafts, music and dance on show.



The Indigenous Australian Dance Festival at Laura, in Queensland, is held at a very old *bora* ground.

Cultural celebration

The Garma Festival in Arnhem Land is one of north Australia's most important indigenous festivals. Nation groups from all over Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory visit. The Garma Festival celebrates indigenous culture including dance, song, music and art.

Did you know?

There are many Indigenous Australian groups that travel the country giving dance performances and programmes. Through sharing their culture, Indigenous Australians are helping other people to understand their way of life.

Young People

Young Indigenous Australians of the Yolngu nation in Arnhem Land learn about their culture through *madayin*. This is when an elder passes on their **knowledge** of how to live life well to a young person. There are "owners" or "holders" of different types of knowledge. As the young people get older, they also become "owners" of knowledge. They can then pass their knowledge on to the next generation.

word bank

knowledge skills and information learned over time through experience or education