



ACT BELONG COMMIT

# CARING FOR COUNTRY

SWAN ENVIRONMENTAL ART PROJECT

A MIDLAND JUNCTION ARTS CENTRE AND CITY OF SWAN PROJECT

This annual environmental art project provides an opportunity for primary school children in the City of Swan to engage with local and global environmental issues and promote a positive message about the importance of protecting the earth.

This year's theme is Caring for Country.

## INTRODUCTION

For more than 65,000 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been living in Australia and have developed a rich knowledge of the land, sea, sky and waterways. Before European colonisation there were more than 250 Aboriginal language groups living in Australia. This includes Aboriginal groups from the South West of Western Australia who are called the Noongar people. Within the Noongar people, there are many smaller Aboriginal groups, each with their own culture, beliefs, lore and knowledge. In Aboriginal culture everyone has a responsibility to care for the environment.

It is important for children to actively connect with and care for, the Country/place in which they live, learn and play. Doing so involves respectfully learning about and understanding First Nations perspectives, in particular, the Whadjuk people of Noongar boodja. Knowledge of Noongar culture creates positive opportunities for children to become socially and environmentally responsible citizens.

Act Belong Commit Caring for Country encourages the investigation of Noongar practices of sustainability how they can help combat some of today's largest environmental concerns such as climate change, bushfires and drought. By building awareness of sustainable land management students learn how to play a role in positively *Caring for Country*.

## LOWER PRIMARY FOCUS (YEARS 1 – 3)

Through stories, lower primary aged children can begin to develop an understanding about culture and connectedness to Country of local First Nation's people. Students should spend time outdoors exploring bush tucker gardens and natural bush areas making discoveries, learning Noongar language and how different places are influenced by the six Noongar seasons. Children will develop artworks that represent these concepts.

## UPPER PRIMARY FOCUS (YEARS 4 – 6)

Upper primary aged children will reflect on and develop their personal sense of connection to the sky, waterways and land on which they live, learn and play. They will develop an understanding and respect for the continual important connection between First Nations people and Country. Students will create artworks exploring the six seasons, local bush tucker, sustainable land management and animals of significance.

## KEY TOPICS TO INVESTIGATE

### WHADJUK NOONGAR NATION

Whadjuk are a clan group of people within the Noongar Nation living across the Swan River plains and Perth Hills. Their Country or boodja is now occupied by the greater metropolitan area of Perth (the area around the CBD was originally known as Boorloo). Whadjuk Noongar people have managed this land for tens of thousands of years, traditionally living in extended family groups, caring for country through cultural ceremonies such as song, dance and use of fire. As a traditionally oral language, there are many ways of spelling Noongar and all words in Noongar language. We have used the spelling Noongar throughout this document but you may also see it spelt Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Nyugah, Yungar and Noonga.

**QUESTION:** What are some of the unique features of the land on which your school stands, and who are the Traditional Custodians of this land?

- Article – About the Whadjuk region [www.noongarculture.org.au/whadjuk](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/whadjuk)
- Interactive Map – [www.boodjar.sis.uwa.edu.au/clickable-regions-map](http://www.boodjar.sis.uwa.edu.au/clickable-regions-map)
- Story – The Carers of Everything by Dr Noel Nannup [www.cockburn.wa.gov.au/getattachment/17768676-147d-4407-b54d-0dab3848bcad/ECM\\_7314756\\_v1\\_The-Carers-of-Everything-Noel-Nannup-pdf.aspx](http://www.cockburn.wa.gov.au/getattachment/17768676-147d-4407-b54d-0dab3848bcad/ECM_7314756_v1_The-Carers-of-Everything-Noel-Nannup-pdf.aspx)
- Interactive website - Keny Djena (first feet) – [www.kenyjenna.wixsite.com](http://www.kenyjenna.wixsite.com)

### CONCEPT OF 'COUNTRY'

For Noongar people, to have connection to Country is to have a deep responsibility to care for the land. The concept of *Country* does not just mean the elements of the landscape such as rivers, hills and waterholes - *Country* includes all living things. It incorporates people, plants and animals. It embraces the seasons, stories and creation spirits. *Country* is spiritual in both a place of belonging, belief and core values. The capitalisation of Country is a demonstration of respect.

**QUESTION:** What does being connected to Country mean to Noongar people? What does it mean to you?

- Article – Noongar connection to Country [www.noongarculture.org.au/connection-to-country](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/connection-to-country)
- Video – Dr Noel Nannup discusses Noongar spirituality and connection to Country [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-k3WGOar\\_4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-k3WGOar_4)

### THE SIX SEASONS

Unlike the European calendar, there are six Noongar seasons in Western Australia's South West region, which are indicated by changes in local plants and animals. Traditionally Noongar people hunted and gathered foods accordingly, being guided by the signs in nature as to which animal and plant resources were plentiful.

**QUESTION:** Why is understanding the changes in the six seasons important?

- Article – Six seasons interactive map [www.derbalnara.org.au/boodjar-six-seasons](http://www.derbalnara.org.au/boodjar-six-seasons)
- Article – Bureau of Meteorology & the Six Seasons [www.bom.gov.au/iwk/calendars/nyoongar.shtml](http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/calendars/nyoongar.shtml)
- Article - How to tell the new season is starting, according to the Noongar people of WA [www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-27/indigenous-season-indicators-wa/100029476](http://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-27/indigenous-season-indicators-wa/100029476)

## NOONGAR BUSH TUCKER

Noongar boodja is rich with plants and animals. Noongar people have extensive knowledge and skills in finding food in a sustainable manner, ensuring that there is always enough for the next season. This knowledge includes the best time of the year to pick fruits, gather seeds and roots, and hunt particular animals. Knowing which food sources are edible and those that are poisonous. Every part of a plant or animal was used – for eating, medicine or other purposes.

**QUESTION:** What does it mean to take only what you need?

- Article – Australian Bush Meats [www.welcometocountry.org/the-original-fresh-food-people-aboriginal-bush-meats](http://www.welcometocountry.org/the-original-fresh-food-people-aboriginal-bush-meats)
- Video – Collecting Jam Tree Gum [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISEL-EFT-1M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISEL-EFT-1M)
- Article – Noongar food resources [www.noongarculture.org.au/food](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/food)
- Video – Commercial farming of bush tucker [www.youtube.com/watch?v=poA99DAPrZA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=poA99DAPrZA)
- Video – Chef Kylie Kwong cooks with native food [www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3527750.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3527750.htm)

## NOONGAR WATER RESOURCES

Prior to European colonisation, Noongar people would find fresh water from a range of locations such as creeks, rivers and gnamma holes (rock holes). These water sources were preserved for long term use. Often animal skins were used to transport fresh water long distances. Knowledge of the seasons indicated changes in weather. Animal signs such as ants building their nests and birds returning to their nests to protect their eggs or chicks, mean rain is on its way. This knowledge continues to be passed down today.

**QUESTION:** Where would you go to find fresh water?

- Video – How do you know when rain is coming? (Lower Primary) [www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/30177/how-do-you-know-when-rain-is-coming-](http://www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/30177/how-do-you-know-when-rain-is-coming-)
- Video – Noongar Ant Story [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp\\_nKgAWLpY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lp_nKgAWLpY)
- Article – Gnamma holes [www.museum.wa.gov.au/explore/wa-goldfields/water-arid-land/gnamma-holes](http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/explore/wa-goldfields/water-arid-land/gnamma-holes)
- Article – Wallaby skin water carrier from the Eastern States. [www.australian.museum/learn/cultures/atsi-collection/cultural-objects/wallaby-skin-water-carrier-pre-1885](http://www.australian.museum/learn/cultures/atsi-collection/cultural-objects/wallaby-skin-water-carrier-pre-1885)

## NOONGAR FIRE RESOURCES

In Noongar culture fire is used for a wide variety of purposes. These include cooking, warmth, light, making paths, encouraging new vegetation growth, growing seeds, hunting (smoking out or trapping animals), making tools, sending messages, ceremonies and for managing the land. Most importantly, fire was used to manage the environment through controlled burning. There is evidence in WA that Jarrah forests were burned every three to four years, while grasslands were burned every two years. This practice ensured that ground cover that could fuel large out of control fires did not build up. Additionally, it was used to cleanse the area. In WA, these fire management strategies such as controlled burning are employed to reduce the severity and size of bushfires.

**QUESTION:** What are the benefits of controlled burns in Western Australia?

- Video – ABC Education Aboriginal fire knowledge reduces greenhouse gases [www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/30042/aboriginal-fire-knowledge-reducesgreenhouse-gases](http://www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/30042/aboriginal-fire-knowledge-reducesgreenhouse-gases)
- Article – Traditional Aboriginal burning explained [www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/fire/fire-and-the-environment/41-traditional-aboriginal-burning](http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/fire/fire-and-the-environment/41-traditional-aboriginal-burning)
- Artwork: Joseph Lycett paintings of First Nations use of fire. [www.nla.gov.au/digital-classroom/year-4/themes/first-peoples](http://www.nla.gov.au/digital-classroom/year-4/themes/first-peoples)

## NOONGAR AGRICULTURE

Noongar people have a long history of farming sustainably in their region. From cultivating soil, planting root vegetables, propagating native seeds, to harvesting, storing and trading grains. For example to make traditional damper or cakes, the Noongar people grind nuts from acacia seeds and the zamia palm to make the key ingredient: flour.

**QUESTION:** If Noongar people farm sustainably, what does it mean to farm in an unsustainable way?

- Article – Noongar food resources [www.noongarculture.org.au/food](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/food)
- Video – Chef Bruce Pascoe cooks a pancake using native grass [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRMNoWrrhb4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRMNoWrrhb4)
- Video – ABC Education First Nations knowledge of spinifex grass [www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/103132/spinifex-research](http://www.education.abc.net.au/home#!/media/103132/spinifex-research)

## NOONGAR SUSTAINABLE FISHING

Noongar people employ a wide range of traditional, sustainable fishing practices to catch fish. From nets made of vines, to catching turtles and gilgies by feeling with your feet. One method involves arranging large stones in shallow water to form a trap to catch fish that come in on the high tide as they can no longer escape when the tide goes back out. Now trapped in shallow waters, fish are then more easily caught by hand or with spears. The remains of a stone fish trap still exists on Yued Country at Wedge Island, near Cervantes.

**QUESTION:** How does the traditional way of fishing protect the environment?

- Article – stone fish traps (Noongar Country) [www.museum.wa.gov.au/wa-maritime-museum-audio-tour/welcome/mungahs](http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/wa-maritime-museum-audio-tour/welcome/mungahs)
- Article – Historical First Nation fishing images [www.aiatsis.gov.au/living-our-waters-gallery](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/living-our-waters-gallery)

## ACTIVITIES TO EXPLORE AT HOME OR IN THE CLASSROOM

### NOONGAR LANGUAGE

Check out the Noongar Boodjar Language Centre for a wide range of resources and packages to learn the basics of the Noongar language at home or in the classroom.

[www.noongarboodjar.com.au/education-and-training/for-teachers/activities](http://www.noongarboodjar.com.au/education-and-training/for-teachers/activities)

[www.noongarculture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Noongar-Dictionary-Second-Edition.pdf](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Noongar-Dictionary-Second-Edition.pdf)

### PLANT A BUSH TUCKER GARDEN

Planting a bush tucker garden can foster an understanding of the importance of place and connection to Country, as well as Noongar knowledge around the uses of bush foods, medicines, histories and native plants. Learn about how to grow and care for the plants used in the garden.

[www.sercul.org.au/our-projects/bushtucker](http://www.sercul.org.au/our-projects/bushtucker)

### CELEBRATE NAIDOC WEEK

NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Australia's First Nations peoples in our continual changing society. This year's theme is Heal Country.

[www.naidoc.org.au/resources/teaching-guides](http://www.naidoc.org.au/resources/teaching-guides)

### ENGAGE IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Invite your family or class to take part in days of significance such as [Clean up Australia Day](#) or [Earth Hour](#). Commit to engaging children with everyday examples of resources and activities that support the care for Country/place.

### ACT BELONG COMMIT CARING FOR COUNTRY PLEDGE CARDS

Prompt thought about what students can do to care for Country with downloadable [Act Belong Commit Caring for Country Pledge Cards](#). Plus checkout the [guide to keeping mentally healthy](#) and discuss how caring for Country and connecting to culture can improve mental health.

## WA CURRICULUM LINKS

Science Content Elaborations Linked to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority: Biological Science and Science as a Human Endeavour.

Dr Elaine Lewis, 2019. [Download PDF](#)

Science Content Elaborations Linked to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority: Chemical Sciences.

Dr Elaine Lewis, 2019. [Download PDF](#)

Science Content Elaborations Linked to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority: Earth and Space Science.

Dr Elaine Lewis, 2020. [Download PDF](#)

Science Content Elaborations Linked to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority: Physical Sciences.

Dr Elaine Lewis, 2020. [Download PDF](#)

## CULTURAL ORGANISATIONS TO VISIT AND EXPLORE

### MAALINUP ABORIGINAL GALLERY

Local gallery in Henley Brook which also offers cultural activities, performances and bush tucker talks and foods. Open weekends and Monday Public Holidays and at other times by arrangement.

[www.maalinup.com.au](http://www.maalinup.com.au)

### WA MUSEUM BOOLA BARDIP

WA Museum Boola Bardip education program is tailored for students from Kindergarten to year 12. In the Connection to Country program students explore the stories, histories and cultures of Western Australia's first peoples.

[www.visit.museum.wa.gov.au/boolabardip/connection-to-country](http://www.visit.museum.wa.gov.au/boolabardip/connection-to-country)

### PERTH ZOO

Excursions to the zoo with activities tailored for all age groups. The Gwabba Boodja-Beautiful Bushland is an interactive experience to discover the Noongar seasons and animal names in the South West. For more info call 9474 0365 or visit [www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/schools](http://www.perthzoo.wa.gov.au/schools)

### ART GALLERY OF WA

AGWA's latest exhibition *Balancing Act* features the work of First Nation artists living and working across the State and Australia. Works of art by local Noongar artists such as Revel Cooper (dec.), Sandra Hill, Dianne Jones and Shane Pickett (dec.) sit loud-and-proud among those by Richard Bell, Karla Dickens, Julie Dowling and Brian Robinson.

[www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/balancing-act](http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/whats-on/exhibitions/balancing-act)

## FREE INCURSIONS AND RESOURCES

### EMRC BUSH SKILLS 4 YOUTH

Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council (EMRC) Bush Skills 4 Youth program can provide free incursions. A session from 1 – 2.5 hours can introduce the Caring for Country theme, with outdoor activities to raise awareness about respecting and caring for the natural areas around your school including Noongar seasons calendar and significant plants. For more information email [catherine.levett@emrc.org.au](mailto:catherine.levett@emrc.org.au) or phone 9424 2244.

### CARING FOR COUNTRY DIGITAL TUTORIALS

This year we've organised for local artist and Noongar Language Specialist Carol Foley to record three new 15 minute tutorials which you can download from the Mundaring and Midland Junction Art Centre websites. These will be released in late July.

## LOCAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS

Noongar people hold a wealth of information about the land, sea, sky and waterways that has been passed down from generation to generation for tens of thousands of years. When engaging the *Caring for Country* theme be sure to seek Noongar community members to share their knowledge, on Country or in the classroom. Please check out a selection of education providers below:

### DJIRRILY DREAMING

School incursions and learning activities for a fun, interactive, Noongar cultural experience, linked to the school curriculum and learning outcomes. Contact Belinda Cox for more information 0424 525 356 [www.djirrilydreaming.com.au/schools](http://www.djirrilydreaming.com.au/schools)

### CREATIVE CULTURE WITH LEA TAYLOR

Creative Culture offers a variety of weaving, art & cultural education workshops. Lea is an award-winning Aboriginal Artist/Weaver with strong cultural connections to Bibbulmun boodja. For more information contact Lea 0419 957 973 [culture@creativeculture.net.au](mailto:culture@creativeculture.net.au)

### BINDI BINDI DREAMING

School incursions, guided walks, bush tucker experiences centred on Noongar culture in Perth. Call Melissa Verma for more information: 0417 031 707 [www.bindibindidreaming.com.au](http://www.bindibindidreaming.com.au)

### TUCKER BUSH SCHOOLS PROGRAM

Tucker Bush School Program includes a collection of twenty Tucker Bush plants delivered to the school, chosen for location and season and associated curriculum linked education lesson plan. Call Mark for more information 0407 193 983 [www.tuckerbush.com.au/schools-program](http://www.tuckerbush.com.au/schools-program)

### RHYS PADDICK

School incursions to provide a range of specialized workshops for students K to 12 with subjects ranging from dreamtime stories, face painting, traditional artefact showcase & discussion, history and language discussions. Call Rhys for more information 0451 828 350 [www.rhyspaddick.com/youthprograms](http://www.rhyspaddick.com/youthprograms)

## BOOKS FROM YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

### BOOKS WITH TEACHERS NOTES

- *Brother Moon* by Maree McCarthy Yoelu (lower primary). [Teachers notes](#)
- *Willy-Willy Wagtail* by Helen Milroy (lower - middle primary). [Teachers notes](#)
- *Black Cockatoo* by Carl Merrison & Hakea Hustler (middle - upper primary). [Teachers notes](#)
- *Young Dark Emu* by Bruce Pascoe (middle - upper primary). [Teachers notes](#)
- *Wilam: A Birrarung Story* by Aunty Joy Murphy and Andrew Kelly. [Teachers notes](#)

### PICTURE BOOKS

- *Mardang Waakarl-ak* by Theresa Walley, Cheryl Martin and Biara Martin (2013) (journey of the Rainbow Serpent and five other stories)
- *Djerap – Noongar Birds*, compiled by Maree Klesch. (2014)
- *Karda wer Noorn (The Goanna and the Snake)* by Charmaine Bennell and Phyllis Bennell (2009)
- *Koorlbardi wer Waardong (The Magpie and the Crow)* by Kathy Yarran (2010)
- *The Trails of the Rainbow Serpents* by Everett Kickett (1995) [Audiobook](#)

### NON-FICTION BOOKS

- *Noongar Bush Medicine: Medicinal Plants of the South-West*. Horsefall & Hansen (2016) University of Western Australia.
- *Noongar Bush Tucker: Bush Food Plants and Fungi of the South-West*. Horsefall & Hansen (2019) University of Western Australia.
- *The Nyoongar Legacy: Naming of the land and the language of it's people* by Bernard Rooney (2011)

This document was produced with the assistance of Noongar Language Specialist Carol Foley.

Midland Junction Arts Centre acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we operate, the Whadjuk people, as well as other First Australians connected with this land. We pay our respects to elders both past and present.

**Midland Junction Arts Centre**

MANAGED BY MUNDARING ARTS CENTRE INC | SUPPORTED BY CITY OF SWAN



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