

Indigenous Languages

Did you know there are over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups in Queensland? State Library of Queensland supports communities in the revival, documentation and preservation of traditional languages. We acknowledge language heritage and knowledge always remain with the Traditional Owners, Elders, language custodians and other community members of the respective language nation.

Language is intrinsically linked to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' way of life, cultures and identities. Language brings meaning to cultural heritage and articulates the intricate relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their connection to their land and community.

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INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

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Culturally inclusive practices

These learning notes have been designed with inclusive pedagogies in mind, however, we invite you to consider the [8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning](#) as you embark on your teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

Learning notes P-12

How to use Indigenous Languages learning notes

These learning notes have been designed to support educators to engage with State Library's celebration of the United Nations' International Year of Indigenous Languages. Many of the resources used in these learning notes can be used across multiple year levels by adapting how they are used with your students and adapted for your school and context. These learning notes are a guide to give examples of how you could begin your journey to discovering the wealth of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in Australia. We will be specifically focusing on the Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages of Queensland in this resource.

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Connecting with your community

If you do not have a connection with your local Aboriginal community or Torres Strait Islander community now would be a good time to start the conversation. The most authentic way to use Aboriginal words and Torres Strait Islander words is by working in collaboration with your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community as they hold the language knowledge.

For tool kits that aim to support community members, language workers and others with useful information to promote community language revival programs and activities, check out the link below:

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/languages/tool-kits>

For further support on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages:

[FAQs: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages](#)

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Preserving and documenting local languages: ideas for schools and teachers

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages, which is an opportunity for schools to celebrate Indigenous languages. It is also an opportunity for schools, teachers and students to contribute to the ongoing preservation and documentation of Indigenous languages, 90% of which are considered endangered. Below is a list of suggested ways you and your school can contribute to the preservation of local languages.

- In partnership with your local community, brainstorm future ways of working together to support the teaching and preservation of language and culture
- Discuss opportunities for the inclusion of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in one subject area each term
- Plan how Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages can be used during key school events and displays every year. For example, during NAIDOC week and Reconciliation Week
- Create a space in the school for local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander resources to be kept so that everyone in the school and local community can access them
- Create bilingual word labels for objects and places around the classroom, school, kindergarten or playgroup centre
- Work with the local community to discover Indigenous names and places of significance, work with school administration to consider renaming sporting houses, debating teams, significant school events
- Using State Library's ["Say 'G'Day in an Indigenous Language"](#) blog, teach students greetings and farewells in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Incorporate these greetings into school assemblies, newsletters, on social media platforms and in the classroom.

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- Using State Library's Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages [word lists](#). Teachers and students can investigate one or many of the Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages of Queensland:
 - language word of the week
 - greetings and farewells
 - animals
 - places and things

Early years

Framing questions

- Who are the Traditional Custodians / Owners of the land our school is on?
- What is the traditional language(s) of the area?
- Are there language speakers in our local community?
- Are there traditional words still used by our local community?
- Which other languages groups are represented in our community?

Using the [AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia](#), students and teachers can explore the Traditional Aboriginal languages and Nations and Torres Strait Islander languages and Nations throughout Australia.

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Exploring languages through story

As a class listen to the Yuwi translation of [‘*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*’](#).

Group activity:

- Work with local community to incorporate local language into a translated version of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*
- Set up a language word wall with local language
- Add words from *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* translation to the word wall
- Using the language word wall have students match Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words and English words from the book
- Create a set of playing cards with the words from the word wall and have students play ‘snap’ and ‘memory’ with the words

Group activity:

Using the **First 5 Forever** [‘Popular nursery rhymes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages’](#) explore Aboriginal words and Torres Strait Islander words through nursery rhymes your students might already know.

- Create and illustrate a bilingual class book of popular nursery rhymes in a Traditional Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language and in English
- Listen and practise popular nursery rhymes in a Traditional Aboriginal language or Torres Strait Islander language

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Group activity:

Listen to **virtual and digital stories** such as:

- Retold digital stories collection from the Torres Straits
<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/contemporary-stories/retold>
- Cape Treasures

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/contemporary-stories/cape-treasures>

Students could:

- Choose a character from one of the stories to illustrate and describe that character using some of the languages words used in the story
- As a class or in small groups students could illustrate a different part of one of the digital stories and retell the story to other classes

Exploring languages through song

Play music by Aboriginal musicians and Torres Strait Islander musicians that feature Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language. Spotify features a playlist called Song in Language: The Australian Indigenous Languages playlist. Other examples are music by Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, Shellie Morris, Emily Wurramara and Joe Geia.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1AGsr7ME2iID9e2b6sBJU0>

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Marrin Gamu is another way to explore learning Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait languages through song. There are songs in Torres Strait Islander languages and many Aboriginal languages spoken in Queensland.

<http://marringamu.com.au/>

Extension activity:

- Working with an Aboriginal community member/s or Torres Strait Islander community member/s, choose a popular nursery rhyme to sing bilingually in standard Australian English and in one of the many Aboriginal languages and/or Torres Strait Islander languages
- Record the songs the students sing to be shared at school and community events
- Students teach another person the popular nursery rhyme. It could be a friend in a different class, a sister or brother, mother or father, aunt or uncle, grandparent or neighbour

Exploring languages through art

Have students draw, colour or paint an animal listed on the [Brisbane Animal Wordlist](#). Label the animals with their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander name(s) and display in the classroom.

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Middle years

Discuss the following framing questions in a [yarning circle](#), which is a traditional Aboriginal process.

- Who are the Traditional Custodians / Owners of the land our school is on?
- What is the traditional language(s) of the area?
- Are there languages speakers in our local community?
- Are they traditional words still used by our local community?
- Which other languages groups are represented in our community?
- If we don't know, where could we look for this information?
- Is this information always in books or on the internet? Why/Why not?

Important point to remember:

If students do not know where they can go to find the answers to the key questions that is okay. The teacher might need to lead the discussion here and talk about where a good place to start looking might be and then let students start making contact. Some suggestions would be to ask school staff, go to your nearest library to ask, research on State Library's website, find out where your local Indigenous Knowledge Centre (IKC) is located and get in contact with them to find out more.

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Using State Library's [Indigenous Language Wordlists Aboriginal Words in English](#) investigate place names and meanings:

- Use the PDF and ask students in pairs or small groups to locate a place name that is an Aboriginal name and find out which Aboriginal Nation/ language group it comes from and the meaning behind the name. For example:
 - Pinkenba means 'the place of long-necked turtle'
 - Muckadilla means 'plenty of water'
 - Burgowan means 'a flat where the dogwood trees grow'
 - Wandoan means 'a flat where grey possums are plentiful'
- Use a yarning circle to share and discuss what they have found out as a whole class. Key question to ask at the end of this yarning circle:
 - Why would it have been important to have had information incorporated into the name of the place for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples?

Extension activity:

- Ask your students to research and name different Aboriginal language words and/ or Torres Strait Islander languages words for a basic English word such as water. Ask them to make notes about what they find to present to the class. Can they make a prediction about why this is the case?

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- If possible, contact your local language centre to see if they would have time to answer some of the student's questions – go to the language centre on an excursion or perhaps someone from the language centre might be able to come to your school to speak with students
- Create a poem, artwork or story narrative with the information they have found to showcase their work

Use State Library's [Interactive languages map of Queensland](#) to investigate Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations.

- Research what are the oral histories or creation stories associated with the local area or a particular landmark
- Create a podcast or vlog telling local oral histories and/or creation stories, include the use of local languages

Connect with your local community to preserve local language through:

- Vlogs
- Digital stories
- Interviews

Have students share their videos and digital stories with the school community at assemblies, on social media channels and via newsletters.

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Senior years

Discuss the following Framing Questions in a [yarning circle](#), which is a traditional Aboriginal process.

- Who are the Traditional Custodians / Owners of the land our school is on?
- What is the traditional language(s) of the area?
- Are there languages speakers in our local community?
- Are they traditional words still used by our local community?
- Which other languages groups are represented in our community?
- Why is the preservation of languages important?
- How can we contribute to the preservation and documentation of languages?
- How does language support the identity (personal, social, cultural) of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander group(s)?
- Has the local language(s) evolved with time, if so how?

Have students interview local community members, asking them the framing questions from their yarning circle, film their responses and share their findings as a class. Compare the responses of their local community to their initial responses.

OR invite local community members to be a part of their yarning circle

Group activity:

Using their responses and their interviews as a starting point, have students create a short documentary (5-7 minutes) on local languages and oral histories, that could be

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used to teach primary school students about the history of the local area. Their documentaries could include:

- Interviews with local community members
- Story, song and/or art
- Local languages
- Spoken or signed components

Research activity:

This research activity can be done individually or in small groups. Using the [AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia](#) assign students with a local group/community to research the and explain:

- Values, respect, reciprocity
- Using knowledge respectfully in order for it to be sustained for future generations
- An understanding of what open/outside and closed/inside knowledge mean culturally
- The natural environment such as the local environment and phenomena such as seasons and cycles from the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.
- Fire stick burning, water sustainability, astronomy
- Traditional food and sources and ways of collection

Share and discuss their findings as a class.

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Individual activity:

Select a children's picture book and using [State Library Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander word list](#), recreate the picture book with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Students could:

- Write and illustrate their chosen story
- Use digital platforms to re-design, illustrate or animate their chosen story with narration
- Design a new medium or platform to share their chosen story, with narration

Share their finished product with the wider school community, this could include working with a local primary school or early childhood facility to read their picture books.

Extension activity:

Have students plan a storytelling night with their school and local community to share their stories.

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Resource list

State Library Queensland resources

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages -

https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/IYIL2019%20FAQs_2.pdf

Brisbane animal words -

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/Brisbane%20Animal%20Words.pdf>

Cape treasures - <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/contemporary-stories/cape-treasures>

Indigenous language wordlists: Aboriginal words in English -

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/Aboriginal%20loanwords%20in%20English.pdf>

Indigenous languages map of Queensland -

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/languages/queensland/indigenous-languages-map>

Popular nursery rhymes in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages -

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/blogs/popular-nursery-rhymes-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-languages>

ReTold: A retelling of stories and songs from “Myths and Legends of the Torres Strait” -

<https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/contemporary-stories/retold>

Say G'Day in an Indigenous Language -

<http://blogs.slq.qld.gov.au/jol/2014/07/03/say-gday-in-an-indigenous-language/>

Tool kits - <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultures-and-stories/languages/tool-kits>

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Word Lists - <https://www.slq.qld.gov.au/discover/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-cultures-stories/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander>

Other resources

AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia - <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

ABC news: Reading The Very Hungry Caterpillar in the Yuwi language - [https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-03/very-hungry-caterpillar-in-yuwi-indigenous-language/11171820?§ion=video&date=\(none\)](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-06-03/very-hungry-caterpillar-in-yuwi-indigenous-language/11171820?§ion=video&date=(none))

Marrin Gamu - <http://marringamu.com.au/>

Songs in Language: The Australian Indigenous Languages playlist (Spotify playlist) - <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1AGsr7ME2iID9e2b6sBJU0>

Yarning Circles - <https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-perspectives/resources/yarning-circles>

8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning - <https://www.8ways.online/>

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Curriculum links

The State Library Queensland Indigenous Languages learning notes can be used to support the following curriculum priorities and capabilities.

Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/languages/framework-for-aboriginal-languages-and-torres-strait-islander-languages/>

Cross curriculum priorities

Sustainability

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/sustainability/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/cross-curriculum-priorities/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-histories-and-cultures/>

General capabilities

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/>

Literacy

- further develop through writing, reading and speaking about ideas, feeling and information students discover these learning notes

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Intercultural understanding

- develop further learning about the value and riches of Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture

Ethical understanding

- develop further understanding of how important Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages are to Aboriginal culture and Torres Strait Islander culture
- develop further understanding about the effects colonisation had on Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages
- develop further understanding that Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages are owned by the communities in which they are spoken
- develop further understanding that language work in schools should be in partnership with the local communities who are the care takers of the Aboriginal languages and / or Torres Strait Islander languages

Critical and creative thinking

- further develop self-awareness skills regarding cultural perspectives
- develop open thinking and skills to look at ideas and concepts through multiple perspectives

Personal and social capability

- developing strong relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language communities
- developing deep listening skills

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ICT capabilities

- develop through research and using apps as learning tools

English links

F-2

Understand that English is one of many languages spoken in Australia and that different languages may be spoken by family, classmates and community ([ACELA1426](#))

Understand the use of vocabulary in familiar contexts related to everyday experiences, personal interests and topics taught at school ([ACELA1437](#))

Replicate the rhythms and sound patterns in stories, rhymes, songs and poems from a range of cultures ([ACELT1579](#))

Listen to, recite and perform poems, chants, rhymes and songs, imitating and inventing sound patterns including alliteration and rhyme ([ACELT1585](#))

Understand that spoken, visual and written forms of language are different modes of communication with different features and their use varies according to the audience, purpose, context and cultural background ([ACELA1460](#))

Identify, reproduce and experiment with rhythmic, sound and word patterns in poems, chants, rhymes and songs ([ACELT1592](#))

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Understand that languages have different written and visual communication systems, different oral traditions and different ways of constructing meaning ([ACELA1475](#))

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Understand that successful cooperation with others depends on shared use of social conventions, including turn-taking patterns, and forms of address that vary according to the degree of formality in social situations ([ACELA1476](#))

Draw connections between personal experiences and the worlds of texts, and share responses with others ([ACELT1596](#))

Understand that Standard Australian English is one of many social dialects used in Australia, and that while it originated in England it has been influenced by many other languages ([ACELA1487](#))

Incorporate new vocabulary from a range of sources into students' own texts including vocabulary encountered in research ([ACELA1498](#))

Understand, interpret and experiment with a range of devices and deliberate word play in poetry and other literary texts, for example nonsense words, spoonerisms, neologisms and puns ([ACELT1606](#))

Create literary texts that explore students' own experiences and imagining ([ACELT1607](#))

Understand that the pronunciation, spelling and meanings of words have histories and change over time ([ACELA1500](#))

Understand how to move beyond making bare assertions and take account of differing perspectives and points of view ([ACELA1502](#))

Understand, interpret and experiment with sound devices and imagery, including simile, metaphor and personification, in narratives, shape poetry, songs, anthems and odes ([ACELT1611](#))

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Understand that different social and geographical dialects or accents are used in Australia in addition to Standard Australian English ([ACELA1515](#))

Create literary texts that adapt or combine aspects of texts students have experienced in innovative ways ([ACELT1618](#))

HASS links:

F-2

Pose questions about past and present objects, people, places and events ([ACHASSI001](#))

Sort and record information and data, including location, in tables and on plans and labelled maps ([ACHASSI003](#))

Compare objects from the past with those from the present and consider how places have changed over time ([ACHASSI006](#))

Reflect on learning to propose how to care for places and sites that are important or significant ([ACHASSI009](#))

Present narratives, information and findings in oral, graphic and written forms using simple terms to denote the passing of time and to describe direction and location ([ACHASSI010](#))

How the stories of families and the past can be communicated, for example, through photographs, artefacts, books, oral histories, digital media and museums ([ACHASSK013](#))

The places people live in and belong to, their familiar features and why they are important to people ([ACHASSK015](#))

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The Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country/Place on which the school is located and why Country/Place is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHASSK016)

The weather and seasons of places and the ways in which different cultural groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, describe them (ACHASSK032)

The history of a significant person, building, site and/or part of the natural environment in the local community and what it reveals about the past (ACHASSK044)

The importance today of a historical site of cultural or spiritual significance in the local area, and why it should be preserved (ACHASSK045)

How changing technology affected people's lives (at home and in the ways they worked, travelled, communicated and played in the past) (ACHASSK046)

The ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples maintain special connections to particular Country/Place (ACHASSK049)

The connections of people in Australia to people in other places in Australia and across the world (ACHASSK050)

3-6

Pose questions to investigate people, events, places and issues (ACHASSI052)

Locate and collect information and data from different sources, including observations (ACHASSI053)

Interact with others with respect to share points of view (ACHASSI059)

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Reflect on learning to propose actions in response to an issue or challenge and consider possible effects of proposed actions ([ACHASSI060](#))

Present ideas, findings and conclusions in texts and modes that incorporate digital and non-digital representations and discipline-specific terms ([ACHASSI061](#))

Days and weeks celebrated or commemorated in Australia (including Australia Day, Anzac Day, and National Sorry Day) and the importance of symbols and emblems ([ACHASSK064](#))

The nature of contact between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and others, for example, the Macassans and the Europeans, and the effects of these interactions on, for example, people and environments ([ACHASSK086](#))

The custodial responsibility Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have for Country/Place, and how this influences views about sustainability ([ACHASSK089](#))

The differences between 'rules' and 'laws', why laws are important and how they affect the lives of people, including experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples([ACHASSK092](#))

Work in groups to generate responses to issues and challenges ([ACHASSI102](#))

The nature of convict or colonial presence, including the factors that influenced patterns of development, aspects of the daily life of the inhabitants (including Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples) and how the environment changed ([ACHASSK107](#))

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Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrants, women and children ([ACHASSK135](#))

The world's cultural diversity, including that of its Indigenous Peoples ([ACHASSK140](#))

Australia's connections with other countries and how these change people and places ([ACHASSK141](#))

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