



**Early Years Activities for
National Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
Children's Day**

COLOURS AS CULTURAL SYMBOLS

This activity has been adapted from the [COLOURS AS CULTURAL SYMBOLS \(EARLY LEARNING\)](#) resource on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

Learning Outcomes:

- Children develop an understanding of the symbolic meanings behind the colours that make up the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag.
- Children understand flags, and the colours that they are comprised of, to be significant cultural symbols.
- Children reflect on the significance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, to their early learning service, to their community, to them personally, and to all Australians.

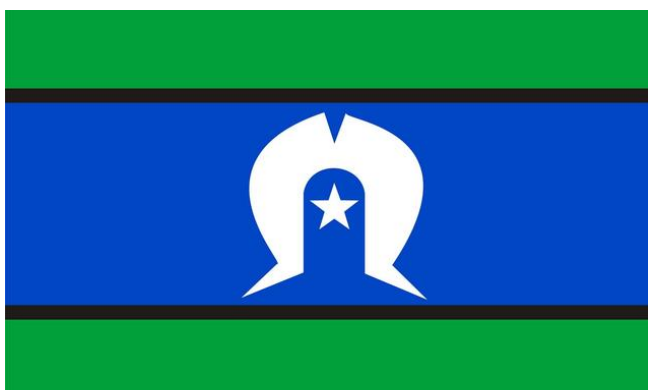
I have a question for you!

- What do the colours in the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag mean? Why are these colours and their meanings special/important?
- What do the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags mean to you/your early learning service/your community/Australia?
- Prior to carrying out this activity with the children, it is important for educators to develop their own knowledge and understanding about the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag, particularly when it comes to the symbolic cultural meanings behind the colours that comprise these flags.
- **For example, the meaning of the Aboriginal flag is represented through:**



- Black: the Aboriginal peoples of Australia
- Yellow: the Sun, the giver of life and protector
- Red: the red earth, red ochre and spiritual relationship to the land

- **The meaning of the Torres Strait Islander flag is represented through:**



- Green: the land
- Blue: the sea
- White: peace
- Black: the Torres Strait Islander peoples

Activity Time!

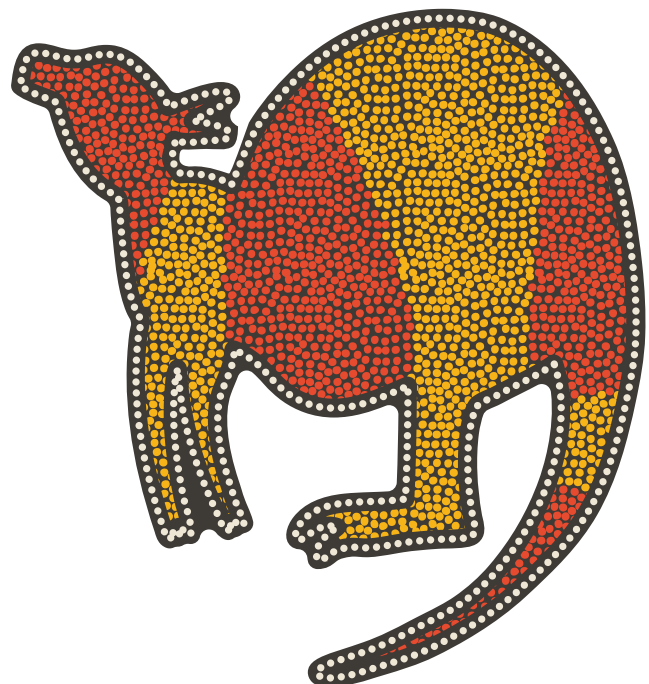
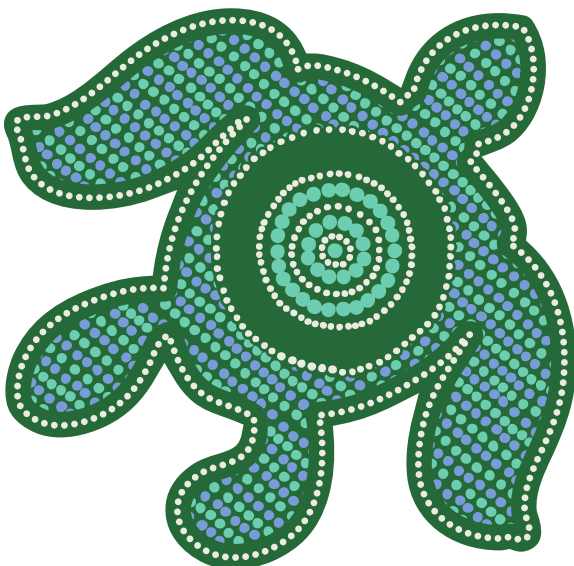
- Before/after one of your early learning service's flag raising ceremonies, or simply as part of an in-classroom discussion with the children, talk to the children about the symbolic cultural meanings behind the colours that comprise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

You may wish to actively involve children in the conversation through prompt questions such as:

- (Where) Have you seen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags being raised/flown?
- What does the Aboriginal Flag mean to you? What does the Torres Strait Islander Flag mean to you?
- What do you think the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples/your community/your early learning service/all Australians?
- Why do you think it is important to know about and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags?
- After your discussion, provide easy opportunities for children to be reminded and proud of the colours that comprise the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag. For example, you may wish to focus on these colours during simple bead threading or yarn weaving craft activities. Think about appropriate ways for children to proudly wear their craft creations, or have them displayed around the classroom as further reminders of the significance of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and the colours that serve as cultural symbols within them.

Tying to the Curriculum

- EYLF Outcome 5.3—Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.
- EYLF Outcome 5.4—Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.



DIFFERENCE IS DEADLY!

This activity has been adapted from the [DIFFERENCE IS DEADLY! \(EARLY LEARNING\)](#) resource on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

Learning Outcomes:

- Children develop an early and positive awareness of differences between people and cultures.
- Children develop an understanding of the importance of appreciating and celebrating differences between people and cultures.
- Children reflect on what is positively unique about their own personal or cultural identity as a platform for appreciating differences between other people and cultures.

I have a question for you!

- What makes me different from other children in my classroom/community and why is that special?
- What is good about being different?
- What makes other children in my classroom/community similar or different to me and why is that special?

Activity Time!

- This activity aims to instil an early appreciation of cultural diversity among children. These early attitudes and understandings can serve as a positive platform for further cultural competence development as children continue to grow and learn. Prior to carrying out this activity, explain to children that the word “deadly” is used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait people to mean “very good,” “great” or “cool.” See if the children can think of any other positive synonyms for this word. Then explain to children that being different is a really “good” or “cool” thing. Ask each child to think about something that makes them or their culture different to other children in their classroom or community. Write down each child's response to complete the statement “I'm different and awesome because...” on separate pieces of paper, and encourage each child to draw an accompanying picture, or bring in a photo from home to stick onto their paper. Once complete, celebrate each child's statement and illustration of difference by sharing them with the rest of the class. For example, you might like to hold or hang up the paper for the whole class to see and tell everyone “[Child's name] is different and awesome because [reason given by child]! How good/special is that?!” Encourage all children to give each other a clap—or another appropriate form of positive reinforcement—when their paper is shown and spoken about.

Tying to the Curriculum

- EYLF Outcome 1.3—Children develop knowledgeable and confident self identities.
- EYLF Outcome 1.4—Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.
- EYLF Outcome 2.2—Children respond to diversity with respect.
- EYLF Outcome 3.1—Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.

COLLABORATIVE ART PROJECT

This activity has been adapted from the [COLLABORATIVE ART PROJECT \(EARLY LEARNING\)](#) resource on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

Learning Outcomes:

- Children develop an awareness of the idea that reconciliation is a collaborative process.
- Children understand the importance of visually demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait histories and cultures.
- Children understand the importance of creating culturally responsive spaces and places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community members.
- Children develop an awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art forms, techniques, materials and symbols, and their cultural and historical significance.

I have a question for you!

- Why is it important for us to show that we are proud of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community members?
- How could art help to make our early learning service a special place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and community members?

Activity Time!

- Where feasible, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, staff, family and community members should be invited to take the lead on the project. Bring children together to create a collaborative artwork for display somewhere in your early learning service. The purpose of the artwork should be to show pride in, and visibly demonstrate respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Use this collaborative art creation process as an opportunity for children to think and learn about:
 - The proposed thematic content of the art, or the story behind it, and why that demonstrates respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
 - What some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art forms, techniques, materials and symbols are, and how these may be appropriately and meaningfully be incorporated into the artwork.
 - How you are going to ensure that all collaborators are able to equitably contribute to the design and creation of the artwork so that it represents a shared representation of your school's respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Once the artwork has been created, proudly display it somewhere in your early learning service, perhaps with an accompanying passage about its meaning and significance. You may wish to facilitate a morning tea when the artwork is first unveiled to remind visitors of your service's appreciation of collaborative and culturally respectful efforts in the spirit of reconciliation.

Typing to the Curriculum

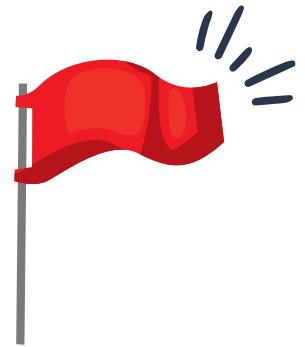
- EYLF Outcome 1.4—Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.
- EYLF Outcome 3.1—Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.
- EYLF Outcome 5.3—Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.
- EYLF Outcome 5.4—Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.

VISIBLY DEMONSTRATE RESPECT

This section has been adapted from the [VISIBLY DEMONSTRATE RESPECT FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURES](#) resource on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

Add this Action to your RAP*! (Reconciliation Action Plan)

- Schools and early learning services should physically and visibly demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions in the school or early learning service environment. This will reinforce work towards reconciliation through the incorporation of meaningful, relevant and culturally appropriate art, artefacts and symbolism into learning environments. It will also make our intentions and actions clear to our students, parents and the broader community.
- Remember that one of the required Actions to be undertaken as part of your RAP is flying or displaying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at your school or early learning service. Often a school or early learning service may have flagpoles near the entrance of the grounds, and this can play an important part in an initial, visible display of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories, cultures and contributions.
- Some further ideas for visibly demonstrating respect are outlined below. It is important to carefully evaluate resources and materials used to visibly demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Using inappropriate resources can risk perpetuating negative stereotypes and misinformation about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories. To better ensure that your resources are appropriate, listen to, and actively seek the advice of, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or organisations.



It is also important to critically consider:

- (How) have you contextualised the resource? (Where and when was it produced? Who produced it? Which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community group(s) is it tied to, and who has authority to use it or talk about it? What was it made from and what was it made for? How did it get to your school or early learning service and what is it doing there? How have you referenced the resource and any protocols around its display and/or use?)
- (How) have you actively honoured its contemporary or ongoing relevance? (What is the value and relevance of the resource beyond the context of its original production? How have you incorporated the resource into genuine and meaningful educational experiences so as not to relegate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives to the past alone? In what ways have you actively engaged with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in designing and/or delivering these learning experiences?)

TOKENISM?

This section has been adapted from the [Tackling Tokenism Professional Learning Resource](#) on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

- Teachers and educators may be concerned about carrying out 'tokenistic' demonstrations of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and cultures. It is important to remember, however, that most resources and ideas are not 'inherently' tokenistic— it is the attitudes and actions around engaging with these resources or ideas that determines whether or not teachers and educators are being tokenistic in their approach.
- Arguably, if reasons for engaging with a resource or idea come from a genuine place of respect, and an active dedication to providing well-researched, rich and respectful learning experiences, then any inclination to consider the approach 'tokenistic' is largely alleviated.
- As Cara Shipp articulates in her 2013 article, [Bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the classroom: Why and how](#), "Is the painted boomerang tokenism? Well, that depends. Did the students engage with Aboriginal people while painting the boomerang? Did they learn about the boomerang, its uses, and the many different kinds of boomerangs traditionally used? Did they learn that the returning boomerang, an Australian icon, was traditionally actually a child's toy, and differently-shaped boomerangs were created as hunting tools? Did they learn how boomerangs are made, incorporating an appreciation of early use of 'physics', and what some of the various Aboriginal names for the objects are?"
- In short, was the learning experience a rich one that advanced the students' intercultural knowledge/understanding in some way?
- More importantly, did the experience allow the students (and teachers) an opportunity to meet and talk with Aboriginal people? And finally, is the boomerang-painting activity just one of many aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures explored across the key learning areas throughout the school in each year level? If the answer to these questions is 'yes,' then I would venture to suggest the painted boomerang is not necessarily 'tokenism.'"



ART AND MATERIAL CULTURE

- Establishing a meaningful relationship with a local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artist or artists' collective may assist you in visibly demonstrating your respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions.
- Incorporating this respect into the physical environment of the school or service gives students the opportunity to reflect on reconciliation through their interactions with the artworks and wider material culture.
- This is particularly important as a prompt for younger children, as the presence of culturally significant art and wider material culture in a shared space can encourage natural curiosity and questioning that may lead to a naturally occurring 'teachable moment'.
- The art and material culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts practice can be highly valued, fetching large sums of money when sold through established art dealers. This monetary value, however, is often far less important than the cultural significance to the artist. Purchasing artwork from local artists, galleries or art centres may or may not be feasible. Should you wish to explore the art of other regions, particularly those of well-known art movements, such as Papunya Tula, ensure that there is a rationale for your choice.
- The accessibility of popular artists' work as prints can seem an 'easy' way of visibly demonstrating respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This, however, reinforces the need for a sound rationale and understanding of the context in which the artwork was created.
- Where appropriate, encouraging students to engage in the co-creation of art with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members provides opportunities for relationship building, not only in terms of a schools' professional relationship with the community, but also the meaningful and ongoing relationships Elders may form with the young people at your school or early learning service.



RECONCILIATION GARDEN

This section has been adapted from the [Reconciliation Garden \(Early Learning\) Curriculum Resource](#) on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

- Creating a reflective space, or a space dedicated to discussion about reconciliation, displays your commitment to reconciliation and also allows students, children and staff to commit their time to engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions.
- These spaces can also be utilised to host community members who might be visiting your school or early learning service for other events. A reconciliation garden may take any form. The garden may be home to native crop plants or may house artwork created by the community.
- It may simply be a space that your school or early learning service has dedicated to reconciliation and reflection. Like many Actions undertaken as a part of your RAP, engaging with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design, construction and dedication of your reconciliation garden is encouraged. This collaboration is one small way to contribute to building positive relationships with your community.



MUSIC

This section has been adapted from the [Narragunnawali Music Subject Guide](#) on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

- Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music, or music exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions, into your daily routine is a great way to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices into your educational programming.
- It also brings to the forefront the work that non-Indigenous musical artists have done to emphasise reconciliation through their work. Publicly playing or performing these kinds of songs, where appropriate, provides yet another means of demonstrating respect in a visible and multi-sensory manner.
- The Narragunnawali Music resource guide provides examples of some well-known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and musicians, as well as some examples of works by non-Indigenous musicians with reconciliation-related themes.
- Where available, children's songs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are also meaningful, and demonstrate how varied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages are across Australia. For example, focusing on the idea of "many languages, one song," First Languages Australia's Marrin Gamu project highlights Australia's important linguistic-cultural diversity.

LITERATURE

This section has been adapted from the [Narragunnawali English Subject Guide](#) on Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali platform.

- Literature and Languages resources can be used as a tool for reconciliation, and for respectful and meaningful intercultural expression and understanding. Including texts written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors increases the variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices present in a school or early services' program, and can help to highlight the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and perspectives.
- The inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature encourages consideration of the influences on an author's writing style, the thematic content, and the impact and audience a written text has beyond the time of publishing.
- There are many authors of fiction and non-fiction who, while not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have respectfully written about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, as well as ongoing or contemporary events and issues. When not in direct use, be sure to proudly display these texts on classroom shelves or in the library, as a clear reminder of their significance.