

# An Ancient People



AUSTRALIA'S MAGNA CARTA INSTITUTE  
SCHOOL OF LAW EDUCATION



**Indigenous** and **Torres Strait** Islander peoples were **residents** of Australia long before European **settlement** in 1788. Their history dates back 60 000 years ago. They were a culture of tribes and **clans** with established customs and traditions of their own, and developed thousands of different language groups **unique** to individual **nations**.

All clans lived in relative harmony, with a social order across **tribes**. They had developed a **legal organisation** to maintain law and order within their communities. And as the original **inhabitants** of the land they had lived on for thousands of years, they had **encompassed** land rights of their own.

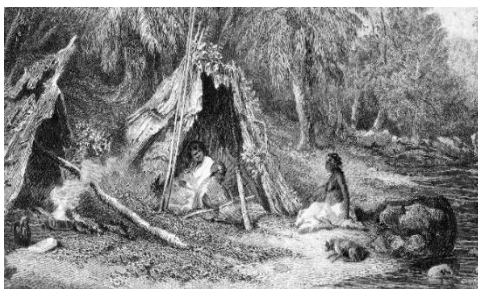
They were **nomadic** people, walking many miles across **vast** landscapes, relocating to find food and shelter. Each **environment** provided new flora and fauna as different sources of food and materials to build their shelters, and they could escape weather events that often made living more challenging or posed risk to life.

Through time, Aborigines occupied a range of environments. From the wet tropics in the north, down through the **arid** desert regions of central Australia, and finally into the grasslands of the south. They **adapted** quickly to changing conditions and **climate**, developing skills in fishing, hunting, and gathering.

*In the south-west, where the many river valleys were covered with low grassy herb fields, the people became **specialised** hunters of red-necked wallaby, wombat and **platypus**. They gathered fruits, roots, berries and eggs, made mantles and foot covers out of the skins of animals, and used fire technology to burn the lands to enhance the growth of new **seasonal grasses** and herbs for the animals. Tools were made from wood, bone and stone. The leg bones of animals were sharpened into bone points for making holes in skins and sewing together for cloaks and foot covers. Bone points may also have been used as points for hunting. A glassy material, **tektite**, was collected from the **meteor crater** site north-east of Macquarie Harbour, and sometimes this favourite material was carried many hundreds of kilometres before being refined into small sharp cutting and scraper tools.*

*Along the coast women **harvested** the sea for a variety of foods including seals, crayfish, muttonfish, warreners and **whelks**. They also trapped birds, collected emu, duck, swan, redbill and mutton bird eggs, and hunted for small land animals including possum, porcupine and **bandicoot**. The people used grease from **porcupine**, possum, mutton bird, seal and penguin to coat their skin as a **waterproof** layer and for warmth against the extreme weather conditions.*

Sourced 'Aboriginal Life Pre-Invasion' [https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion\\_to\\_tasmanian\\_history](https://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history)



The people developed laws and social rules that maintained **kinship** (family) **obligations**, and **ancient** stories of the **Dreamtime** preserved **traditional** culture and beliefs down through the generations. These stories connected them to their **ancestors** and the lands that they had left far to the north. A strong bond to this land gave the **Aboriginal** people a sense of responsibility and managing the environment through **preservation** of native **flora** and **fauna** was **essential** for **survival** in such harsh landscapes.

**My Place** Before Time: Bunda

[https://myplace.edu.au/teaching\\_activities/1878\\_-\\_before\\_time/beforetime01bunda/episode\\_landing\\_25.html](https://myplace.edu.au/teaching_activities/1878_-_before_time/beforetime01bunda/episode_landing_25.html)

**My Place** Before Time: Barangaroo

[https://myplace.edu.au/teaching\\_activities/1878\\_-\\_before\\_time/beforetime02barangaroo/episode\\_landing\\_26.html](https://myplace.edu.au/teaching_activities/1878_-_before_time/beforetime02barangaroo/episode_landing_26.html)

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**TASK 1** - The 'elders' of an indigenous tribe were leaders in their community.

The tribe was expected to follow and abide by all laws and decisions that were made and enforced by the elders.

Imagine you are an elder in a tribe of your own people. It is your responsibility to create a set of rules and laws to help the tribe live peacefully and safely under your leadership.

Use the following steps to help you through this process:



1. Give your tribe a name
2. List and describe all members that are part of the tribe and what roles they play in the community
3. Decide on who will be in your council (don't include more than 4 or 5 members)
4. Then, together with your council, create a set of laws for the tribe.

**TASK 2** - Research drawings and artwork to create a montage illustrating indigenous peoples' way of life prior to European settlement in 1788. As an extension to your work, you may find and include artwork that illustrates the different environments tribes inhabited throughout Australia.

Your montage can be presented in poster or digital form

**TASK 3** - Create a *tagxedo* using the words from the text highlighted in bold. You can choose any shape you like!

[www.tagxedo.com](http://www.tagxedo.com)



**TASK 4** - Complete a Venn diagram illustrating the way of life indigenous people have lived over time comparing it to how they live today.

