# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures glossary

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Individuals within the diversity of nations that make up the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Indigenous, Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

The many diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that have always been located on the Australian continent and adjacent islands.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Indigenous, Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Aboriginal Peoples

A term commonly used to describe the diverse cultural groups of the First Peoples to live on the Australian continent and Tasmania; however, many Aboriginal Peoples prefer using a more specific community or Nation name, to be more culturally specific.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Indigenous

Australian continent and adjacent islands

The Australian continental mainland and the islands surrounding it, including the Torres Strait Islands.

In other contexts ‘the Australian continent’ may refer to the geographical continent, which includes mainland Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and other islands.

belief system

A set of principles or tenets that together form the basis of a philosophy, law and lore.

colonisation

The act of invading and forcibly seizing territory with the aim of establishing a community of the invader’s cultural group; a global phenomenon. This process is often violent and usually has significant negative impacts over time for the indigenous peoples who are dispossessed of their land, culture, languages and customs.

In Australia, colonisation began in 1788 with the landing of the First Fleet and the dispossession of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation from their Country around the Sydney region.

community

‘Community’ refers to and acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Victoria. It can be used to describe the entire Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community or smaller specific communities.

Country

The physical environment that a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ group has a relationship with. Referring to this territory as ‘Country’, rather than land, indicates a reciprocal and deep relationship and one where Country both owns and is owned by the People. The concept of Country includes lands, waters and sky.

cultural expression

The cultural content resulting from the creativity of societies, groups and individuals. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, cultural expression includes stories, symbols, song, dance, artworks, material culture, and body, cave and sand paintings. In contemporary society, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more commonly express culture through new media, including digital images, lightscapes and soundscapes, and contemporary music and dance.

culturally responsive curriculum

A curriculum that respects learners’ cultures and the prior experiences and knowledges that they bring to class with them. A culturally responsive curriculum ensures that all students have their cultural contexts reflected through the curriculum and provides all students with the chance to succeed regardless of their individual cultural contexts.

culture

When used specifically in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ‘cultures’ refers to complex kinship systems and rules for social interaction, and the body of beliefs, attitudes, values, language(s), skills, knowledge, Country, lore, laws, ceremonies, customs and tools by which communities structure and organise their lives and interactions. When applied to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, ‘culture’ is usually pluralised (unless referring to one specific group) to represent the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural groups across contemporary Australia.

customs

The various and unique cultural practices and behaviours that have been passed on through the many generations of a particular community or group of people.

First Nations Peoples

A broad term for Australia’s 2 distinct Indigenous cultural groupings on the Australian continental mainland and the islands surrounding it, including the Torres Strait Islands. First Nations Peoples are also commonly referred to as Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; each encompasses a diversity of nations across Australia.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, Indigenous, Torres Strait Islander Peoples

First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria

An independent and democratically elected body that was formed to represent Traditional Owners of Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Victoria.

See also: Treaty, Voice

histories

Diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts and perspectives, past, present and ongoing.

holistic values and belief systems

This term relates to the Dreaming and how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples conceptualise the world and their place in it, including the interconnectedness of everything in the human and more-than-human worlds. It also recognises the responsibilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and non-Indigenous people, to understand and care for Country and Place and the interconnected systems that all living entities rely on to thrive.

identity

The understanding of self and our place in the wider world, often constructed from within ourselves and through the family, kinship and community connections that we benefit from. Identity is also important to supporting belonging and wellbeing. The colonisation of Australia has greatly impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ identities.

Indigenous

A term that is used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, but which does not acknowledge the cultural diversity in Australia. When this term is used in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and their cultures and histories etc., a capital ‘I’ should be used.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Aboriginal Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)

The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to own and control their cultural heritages and knowledges. It refers to all aspects of cultural heritage, including the tangible, such as cultural objects, and the intangible, such as knowledge.

invasion

The act of one nation-state using force to take control of a specific piece of territory and the people already living there. British colonisation was experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as a violent invasion that denied their occupation of and connection to Country and Place.

kinship

A system used to decide how people relate to each other, and their roles, responsibilities and duties. It is a feature of all cultures around the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ social organisation and family relationships are often complex and nuanced. Rather than being predominantly based on genetics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship also relates to the obligations, expectations and responsibilities that people have to each other.

Koori

A collective term for all Aboriginal Peoples originating in southern New South Wales. Also sometimes used to refer to Aboriginal Peoples originating in Victoria (although ‘Koorie’ is more common).

Koorie

A collective term for all Aboriginal Peoples originating in Victoria.

living communities

Ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander living communities. Despite the past and present impacts of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship systems, customs and traditions still thrive, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remain strong and resilient.

Makarrata

A Yolngu word that can be understood as ‘the coming together after a struggle’. The Uluru Statement from the Heart calls for a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling.

See also:Uluru Statement from the Heart

nations

Communities of people that are formed based on a common language, history, ethnicity or culture and, in many cases, a shared territory. Prior to colonisation, there were more than 250 different nations across the Australian continent and adjacent islands.

native title

Australian law recognises that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples continue to hold rights and interests in land and water.

Native Title Act 1993

Legislation that provides the means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to apply for recognition of native title.

Place

‘Place’ is significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

For Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ‘Place’ is a space mapped out that Torres Strait Islander individuals or groups occupy and regard as their own and that has varying degrees of spirituality. It includes lands, waters and sky.

For Aboriginal Peoples, ‘Place’ refers to the special places that exist within Country, the purposes of which vary significantly. They can include places of ceremony and initiation, birth and the provision of healing and health care; places of learning; and places for Sorry Business. These places vary greatly over the various landscapes and seascapes across the continent. There are some parts of Country that have landmarks that directly relate to the ancestor spirits and the creation of existence. These are especially important as culturally significant places and need to be cared for. There are also other places on Country that are important for ceremony, as mentioned above, which are also considered especially important for Aboriginal communities.

See also: Sorry Business

reconciliation

The truth-telling and accountability required to support outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australia. Teachers and the curriculum have an important role in supporting reconciliation through fearless engagement with true, accurate, authentic and sometimes uncomfortable content in the classroom. Through the embedding of reconciliation in the classroom, students can be equipped to engage in important national discourse relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts.

settlement

The occupation of a previously uninhabited or inhabited land.

The accepted British narrative from 1788 until the late 20th century was that the Australian continent and adjacent islands were possessed through peaceful settlement, not conquered. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples experienced this as invasion and as a violent process.

Sorry Business

The term used to describe the mourning period when a member of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has passed away. It also relates to all the responsibilities that those in the community have to the deceased person and their family in accordance with lore and customs.

spirituality

The worldviews and relationships that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with the more-than-human worlds. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ spirituality in Australia is unique to each Country and certain Places and often also includes ancestor and animal spirits as part of how the belief systems are experienced. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ spirituality includes many ceremonies, some of which are also a form of restricted culture and knowledge where only some people are permitted to witness these ceremonies and access the relevant knowledges.

terra nullius

A concept in international law meaning ‘a territory belonging to no-one’ or ‘over which no-one claims ownership’. The concept has been used to justify the colonisation of Australia.

Torres Strait Islander Peoples

First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait who have occupied the region for more than 4000 years. The people from this region may also refer to themselves as Zenadth Kes, which is an amalgamation of Torres Strait Islander language names for the 4 winds that pass through the region.

See also: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, First Nations Peoples, Indigenous

Traditional Owners

The people recognised as having an unbroken connection to a particular Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Country or Place. They are often important knowledge keepers and responsible for caring for Country or Place and the people who live there.

Treaty

Agreement-making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Treaty is one of the reforms called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. In the Victorian context, the First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria is tasked with meeting with the Victorian Government to negotiate a statewide Treaty to empower Traditional Owners to make decisions that affect their communities, cultures and Country.

See also:First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria, Makarrata, Uluru Statement from the Heart

Uluru Statement from the Heart

An invitation from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to non-Indigenous Australians, calling for reforms that can be broadly described as Voice, Treaty and Truth. The Statement was issued in May 2017, after more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates met at the First Nations National Constitutional Convention.

See also:Makarrata, Treaty, Voice

Voice

A say in the decision-making processes that affect the lives, cultures and communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. A constitutionally enshrined, representative Voice to Parliament is one of the reforms called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria is an example of a state-based Voice.

See also:First Peoples’ Assembly of Victoria, Makarrata, Uluru Statement from the Heart