

LEARNING RESOURCE

A STORY ABOUT THE SUN

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS ASTRONOMY

Years K–6
Stage 3

A STORY ABOUT THE SUN FROM THE BOORONG COMMUNITY OF THE WERGAIA NATION

The story shared here provides us with some of the astronomical knowledge held by the Boorong community of the Wergaia Nation. They are the traditional owners and custodians of the land in what is now known as north-western Victoria near Lake Tyrell.

Traditionally, cultural knowledge and beliefs are passed from generation to generation, through living stories based on observation over vast amounts of time, song and dance. Sharing by the Elders now permits us to promote this astronomical knowledge to the broader Australian public for the first time.

The astronomy of the Boorong was the first example of Indigenous knowledge of the sky documented by Europeans, in this case by the Philosophical Institute in Melbourne in 1857.

This is a story that has been shared by the Elders of the Boorong community of the Wergaia Nation in what is now known as north-western Victoria. We are privileged to share it today with our friends.

The Nurrumbunguttia, or the old spirits, lived here before the first people. They are represented by Pupperimbul, a small finch. To kill the finch is forbidden and will result in a very bad flood.

The Earth was in total darkness until Pupperimbul threw Gnowee (an emu egg) into the sky. She burst to become the Sun and spread light for all to see. Her sister is Chargee Gnowee the planet Venus.

There was a great flood and the Nurrumbunguttia went to the heavens and became the stars. Warring (The Milky Way) is smoke from the campfire of the Nurrumbunguttia.

METHOD:

Please print the story on the next page TWICE, single sided on different colour paper if possible. Then cut each into 9 strips (one sentence per strip). After the video conference divide the class in two, shuffle the sentences and hand one set to each group.

Give them 5 minutes to reconstruct the story. There are several possibilities but for reasons of cultural authenticity and respect, it is essential to acknowledge the origin of the story first.

When complete ask them to recount the story without reading it as Indigenous knowledge systems do not rely on the written word. Most will be unable to do so, so let them read with the awareness this is not the traditional method of transfer. They might like to research how information is passed from one generation to the next.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

What should come first in an Indigenous account?

Acknowledgment of the owners that have permitted it to be shared and the origin. It is a mark of respect and permission.

What are some of the messages in this story?

There are always laws or rules and consequences for breaking them.
The story explains natural phenomena of daylight.
The story explains the nature of the stars.

What does the story imply?

Someone broke the law and killed a finch.

Is there any proof?

Yes though it is implied as we don't see the Nurrumbunguttia any more.

Can the gender of the Sun be identified?

Yes, the Sun is female which is unusual on a global scale (Germany, India also see the Sun as female, most cultures see it as male). The Moon is male.

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