

# Local Indigenous Knowledge

## People of the Adelaide Plains



The heart of the Kurna Land originates in the parklands in the city, which existed as open grassy plains with patches of trees and scrub before the 1830's as a result of skilful land management. The River Torrens as we know it today acted as the focal point for the land owners, who called the river Karrawira Pari (translating to red gum forest river). The river acted as a necessary resource for the people, providing a sustainable source of both food and water and was a popular location of the people. The name Kurna most likely originates from the term 'man' or 'people'. The Kurna people are known for having a sophisticated culture with a deep understanding of the natural environment, speaking in a complex language and centred their culture on teaching and understanding.

Furthermore, protocols or customs may fluctuate based on the geographic location and the respective land owners, outlining the importance for us to understand and recognise the differences that exist. Indigenous culture is centred around 5 interconnected pillars (land, family, law, ceremony and language). These 5 pillars combine to create a unique view of the world that is distinctly indigenous. Learning about these intrinsically linked cultural aspects helps us as non-indigenous people understand the damage done by the colonisation of Australia by the Europeans. For example, being removed or disconnected from their culture, a sense of identity or belonging can be lost and therefore remove purpose from one's existence. Learning about these unique cultures helps us determine appropriate responses to past atrocities.

### Local Knowledge

Knowledge from local Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders is that of historic learning, values, ways of the land hunting, art and many more aspects of original owners of the lands heritage. This knowledge is based on the social, physical and spiritual understandings which informed the people's survival. The aboriginal people of Australia are part of the oldest continuous living cultures in human history, this long line of history has provided the aboriginal people a great knowledge of the land and how to sustain life from their natural environment. This close harmony between the land and its people gives knowledge of natural resources and both the skills and spirituality within the culture and the land being incorporated within both.

### Cultural Considerations

Most simply, culture refers to people's way of life; concerned with their values, customs and beliefs. Cultural considerations therefore refer to the principles or practices that guide behaviour, determine what we eat, wear and how we celebrate occasions; based on historical traditions that are passed on through generations. The need to acknowledge and respect the indigenous culture relates to the long-standing history of prejudice, discrimination and misunderstanding. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is complex and rich in history, yet is still constantly evolving and therefore dynamic in nature.



**Presented by Matt Brown and Thomas Main**

The statement “The accumulated knowledge which encompasses spiritual relationships, relationships with the natural environment and the sustainable use of natural resources, and relationships between people, which are reflected in language, narratives, social organisation, values, beliefs, and cultural laws and customs” by (Andrews 2006) explains how the knowledge of the local people is represented in many different ways throughout their culture.

This knowledge being in stories, dance, art or even in its most basic form of education passed down through generations from elders of the people. To date the respect and use of the local information must be preserved. This can be done by The maintenance and transmission of this knowledge because it is central to the lives and continuation of the history and knowledge of the elders and the peoples preserved culture. Just some of the local knowledge includes safe edible food from the land, different tools for not only survival but imitation and art and weapons for hunting as well as specific skills being used by the aborigines for centuries. Aboriginal stone tools were highly sophisticated in their range and uses.

Stone and natural glass were fashioned into chisels, saws, knives, axes and spearheads. Stone tools were used for hunting, carrying food, for making ochre, nets, clothing, baskets and more. The use of the land and resources available were key to the survival and and continuation of the Aboriginal people and allowed them to adapt and thrive in their surroundings.

# Local Knowledge - Fire

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jbyd0LuVoZw>

Fire is of huge cultural significance to the indigenous Australians and helps to illustrate the unique and intimate relationship the people have with the land. In Kurna Land, fire was used to manage the Adelaide plains, shaping the ecosystem and enriching the land they live on. Similar to burn offs that we see today, strategic and deliberate burning of the land helps to clear away the flammable dead scrub whilst conserving existing, healthy trees. This burning process provides evidence of the sophisticated nature and deep understanding that the Indigenous people had, contrary to historic beliefs. This burning process enriches plant life, rejuvenating native woodland and promoting growth. This new growth can be used to attract animals to hunt and eat; a task much easier when not navigating through thick scrub. Fire also has many other useful properties; including cooking purposes, signalling purposes to indicate when hunting to reduce over-hunting in one specific area and for burning leaves during cleansing ceremonies.

Above is a link to demonstrate the technique of starting a fire using the friction technique, a technique which is still practiced and used today by the Indigenous people.



# How to Engage Respectfully

As non-Indigenous people, it is imperative that we recognise the need for us to engage with the original land owners; whether this be through attending an Indigenous-led event or inviting a local Indigenous representative to speak at one of your events. When done well, that is respectfully and meaningfully, long-term relationships can be established between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; providing a platform to develop cross-cultural understanding, develop new perspectives on culture and ultimately help acknowledge past historical pains and help contribute to the healing process. However, consideration is required before taking any action; specific to your intentions or reasons. Being too heavy handed can put unwanted pressure on your local Indigenous community and the people within it. Some useful tips for respectfully engaging include:

- Acknowledge diversity
- Involving leaders (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)
- Undertake cultural training
- Seek support from Elders
- Develop a shared purpose for this engagement (ie. mutually beneficial for both parties)
- Don't rush or force anything



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