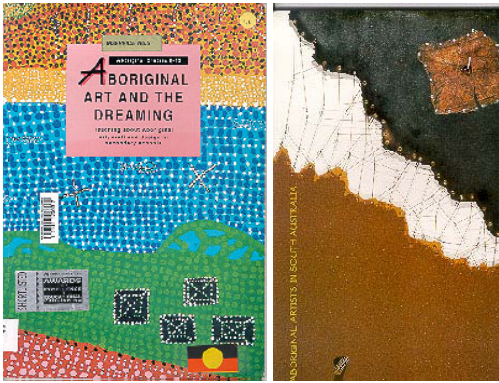


## Aboriginal art - some practical strategies by Adele Pring, email [sasose@adam.com.au](mailto:sasose@adam.com.au)



The books '**Aboriginal art and the Dreaming**' and '**Aboriginal artists in South Australia**' were put together to help with teaching about Aboriginal art. Some schools would have copies of both. Copies can be borrowed from the Aboriginal Education Resource Centre, 5 Harewood Avenue, Enfield, tel: 8343 6538. Email [sasose@adam.com.au](mailto:sasose@adam.com.au) for professional development.

**Teach first** about the diversity of traditional Aboriginal art from different parts of Australia, eg 'dot' paintings, which were originally done on the ground in Central Australia, 'x-ray' paintings from Arnhem Land. A good video to show both is *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia*, available through SA Museum shop [sam.shop@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:sam.shop@saugov.sa.gov.au) for \$28.95 [www.samuseum.sa.gov.au](http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au). Ensure that learners understand that traditional art links strongly to traditional stories and law, ceremony, dance and song.

**Show examples** of both traditional and contemporary art and artists from the above mentioned books and perhaps have learners view the first half of the video *Shimmer in the city* which shows a range of contemporary Aboriginal artists and their work. This video is available through DECS Tape Services, [www.tapeservices.sa.edu.au](http://www.tapeservices.sa.edu.au)

**Involve an Aboriginal artist** with learners. Advice on ways to contact an artist can be obtained from Aboriginal Education personnel in District education offices, Tauondi Inc. tel 8341 2777 or through education officer at Tandanya, tel 8224 3200.

### Practical art lessons

When time comes for learners to do some practical art themselves, have them design their own symbols to tell their own important story (eg life story, a memorable event in their lives, a family tree, a Dreaming story studied by the class, an aerial view of their own home or community or whatever).

If learners are developing their own symbols to tell their own personal stories, they can use any colours they want. If they're working with an Aboriginal artist who says they can use particular colours or symbols, then go with that. The main thing is to check with the local community or context.

In the past some teachers had students simulate Aboriginal art and they were told not to use red, but simulating isn't appropriate as learners don't understand the deep significance of the symbols being used. It would be a bit like getting learners who don't know much about religions to use the Christian Cross, the Star of David and other simple looking symbols without understanding the deeper significance. However, teaching about symbolism in addition to that in Aboriginal art is a good way for students to understand the concept of symbols, eg:

- letters of the alphabet and numbers as well as ?/+-%\$@ symbols etc.
- other religious symbols including the swastika which is a religious symbol in parts of Asia
- the symbols of various flags (again they look simple but convey strong emotions)
- symbols of national emblems
- footy club colours and other uniforms as symbols
- Scottish clan tartans
- symbols for corporations (McDonalds M is sadly the world's most widely recognised symbol)

Once learners understand all this and have a go at developing their own symbols to tell their own important story, they are more able to 'read' Aboriginal art and understand that while something looks simple, there is strong meaning underneath. They can also include secret symbols in their art that they don't have to share with anyone.

**Literacy support:** Once learners have created their art, they then have many starting points or clues for extended writing. Educators find it is more effective to do the symbols first, then write, than the usual task of writing a story then if there's time, illustrating it.

When learners share meaning from their symbolic stories, they only have to tell as much as they want. Their secrets can remain within whereas this is hard to do with words.

## Examples from *Aboriginal art and the Dreaming*

P 33 Kelly Taylor from **Port Augusta** displays '**dot**' **paintings**, including Lightning Dreaming on the left. Kelly has permission to paint these stories from her grandmother who is a custodian. Other Aboriginal people are not allowed to paint Dreamings without permission on custodians.

P 33 Mannum High School students designed their **own symbols** to retell the Ngarrindjeri story of Ngurunderi, the creator of the **River Murray**.

P 36 The story of the **creation of Wilpena Pound** is told in the **rock art**. Two giant snakes surround the circles of people before consuming them and lying down to die, thus forming the walls of the Pound. Note that the symbols are very abstract, very much like symbols used for writing in English.

P 44 A '**ground painting**' is recreated at Tandanya. This is how traditional art was made in **Central Australia** as well as being painted on bodies. Now it is also being painted on canvas then sold.

P 46 Men from **Central Australia** with **body painting** for the Fire and Emu Dreaming dance.

P 53 An **Arnhem Land** style of '**bark painting**' to tell the story of the creation of the Milky Way. Each clan has a style of **cross hatching** which identifies them, just as Scottish clans have tartans and footy players have their colours.

P 54 A crocodile painted in **Arnhem Land** showing symbolic ribs and spine in the '**x-ray**' art style

P 56 and 57 Billy Rankine, a **Ngarrindjeri** man from the Coorong, shows the mat he made by **weaving with rushes**. On the opposite page is a basket made by a **Ngarrindjeri** man Clarence Long.

P 66 Symbolic designs engraved on a **possum skin cloak**. It is from Lake Condah in **western Victoria**.

P 66 **Carved clubs** from the **Torres Strait Islands**

P 74 **Kunyi June McInerney** tells the **stories of her life** through her paintings, including living in a **mission home** then working as a nurse at **Indulkana**.

P 75 **Ilyipi** from **Fregon** in South Australia paints pretty pictures on board in the style of 'sand drawings' which are a bit like doodles, having no story.

The cover art is by **Melissa Walker** of Smithfield Plains High. It tells the story of a school camp on **Yorke Peninsula**, a story of significance to Melissa. Note the **aerial view** of the tents.

## Examples from *Aboriginal artists in South Australia*

P 11 **Billy Wara**, of **Central Australia**, doesn't paint his Dreaming, he sculpts it out of red gum. The **perentie lizard** is his Dreaming.

P 89 **Heather Shearer** paints **snakes** from her Dreaming. She is **not allowed to paint lizards**. Her country is north of Alice Springs.

P 16 **Alec Minutjukur** of **Ernabella** used the '**dot**' style to tell a **contemporary story** of how he would like to get his community healthy and strong again.

P 22 **Jillian Davey** of **Ernabella** paints the story of the **Seven Sisters**, a Dreaming which links many Aboriginal groups throughout Australia. The sisters are usually being chased by a man who shouldn't be chasing them. It is a story common around the world and which involves the **Pleiades** constellation in the night sky.

P 28 At **Indulkana** many artists use the **lino printing** style of art which reflects skills brought to the community by an art teacher. Some lino prints tell Dreaming stories and others are just designs.

P 32, 33 At **Oak Valley** in far west SA, the community make **didgeridoos**, not because they are traditional (they are not) but because buyers want them. Didgeridoos originated in northern Australia.

P 40 **Everard Prayta** at **Ceduna** paints using his mouth as he is quadriplegic.

P 44 **Byron Pickett**, the father of the North Melbourne footballer and originally from **Western Australia** then Port Lincoln, is an excellent **carver of emu eggs**.

P 52 **Gordon Waye** paints in the **landscape style** images from Central Australia where he lived at one time. He frequently includes spirit figures in the paintings.

P 57 **Tracey Boland** draws designs reflecting the **colours and patterns** of Coober Pedy where she lives. She is still learning about her culture.

P 64 **Regg Dodd photographs** places linked to his Dreaming around **Marree** and **Lake Eyre**.

P 75 **Mark Blackman** from **Queensland** has used **mathematic symbols** to have viewers think about eg 'more than' and 'less than', 'equal but different'.

P 76, 77 **Kerry Giles** paints her passions and concerns relating to the **River Murray**, her home country.

P 81 **Max Mansell**, of **Tasmania**, tells **contemporary** stories by adapting the 'dot' style.

P 91 **Ngarrindjeri** man **Jacob Stengle** paints in a combination of **surreal and realism** to show special places in his country and from his Dreaming

P 102, 103 **Ian Abdulla** of the **Riverland** paints in the naive style, events that happened in his youth. He didn't want to get into trouble by using styles 'belonging' to other communities.