



CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Level: All years

Curriculum area: Cross-curriculum

Acknowledgement of Country

This activity encourages students to develop a respect for, and understanding of, Indigenous protocols used in the community. After exploring the meaning and purpose of existing ways of observing Indigenous cultures within their school community, students work to develop an 'Acknowledgement of Country' for use in their class/school.

The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) has been a partner in the *What Works* program since 2000. The *What Works* program encourages school-community partnerships aimed at providing improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students through effective teaching and respect for their cultures.

Background

The success of the *What Works* program is based on effective school–community partnerships. By supporting teachers to develop positive relationships with Indigenous communities, the program has encouraged teachers to better understand and provide for Indigenous students in their classes. An important element of *What Works* is promoting respect for Indigenous students and cultures in schools.

Many Australian schools have developed practices to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as traditional custodians of the land. For example, at formal events it may be appropriate to invite a locally recognised Elder to perform a Welcome to Country at the start of the event. At other times, the leader of a school assembly or chairperson of a meeting can start proceedings with an Acknowledgement of Country. Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by non-Indigenous people. In the context of Australia's Indigenous culture, 'Country' refers to 'this' place rather than Australia as a country. Further information on these protocols can be found on the Queensland Studies Authority site at http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/syllabus/indigenous_p001_0802.pdf or by visiting the Western Australian Department of Education and Training website — <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/abled/docs/WelcomeToCountryAug2007.pdf>

This IDEAS activity allows students to analyse the meaning and purpose of protocols relating to Acknowledgement of Country. Students will undertake research to learn about the traditional custodians of the land in the area where their school is located. They will then develop an Acknowledgement of Country appropriate for their class/school.

Learning outcomes

Students will:

- research the culture and history of the traditional Indigenous people from the area where their school is located
- work with the local Indigenous community to explore ways of recognising their culture/s
- identify ways of respecting Indigenous cultures in their school environment
- develop an understanding of cultural inclusion.

References

What Works — <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/>

Dare to Lead — <http://www.daretolead.edu.au/>

Reconciliation Australia — <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans>

LEARNING SEQUENCE

Getting started

Ask students to work in groups to develop an improvisation about someone visiting their family's home for the first time. Encourage students to think about the words people use and the actions people take in the first few minutes after the visitor arrives.

When all groups have performed their improvisations in front of the class, discuss the words and actions that were common to all/many groups. Why were they used? What do they tell us about our own culture/values?

Students at work

1. A **Welcome to Country** is a way of demonstrating respect for Indigenous people and culture at formal events. There is no set form of words, and the Welcome is provided by a locally recognised Elder or another representative of the traditional custodians of the area.

Read the following words to your students. They are an extract from the Welcome to Country given by Ngambri-Ngunnawal elder Matilda House at the opening of the 42nd Federal Parliament on 12 February 2008.

I would like to welcome you here today to the land of my ancestors, the land of the Ngambri people. Firstly I'd like to acknowledge my ancestors and elders for laying a strong foundation for our younger generation and for those who are coming forward.
... A Welcome to Country acknowledges our people and pays respect to our ancestors' spirits who have created the lands. This then allows safe passage to all visitors. For thousands of years our people have observed this protocol. It is a good and honest and a decent and human act to reach out and make sure everyone has a place and is welcome.

You can watch Matilda House deliver the full Welcome to Country speech at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/video/2008/02/12/2160412.htm>

Invite students to discuss the following questions:

- Why do you think the Australian Government decided to have a Welcome to Country for the opening of the 42nd Parliament in 2008? This was the first time a Welcome to Country had been used at the opening of the Australian Parliament. It was an initiative of the newly-elected Rudd Labor government.
- What are some of the reasons a Welcome had not been included in the opening of the Australian Parliament prior to 2008?
- Is the Welcome to Country that was used for the opening of Parliament suitable for use in your school? Why?/Why not?
- Are there events at your school where it might be appropriate to have a Welcome to Country? If so, which events?

The text of an alternative example of a Welcome to Country speech, given by Karen Jackson from Victoria, can be found by visiting http://www.vu.edu.au/library/scripts/objectifyMedia.aspx?file=pdf/550/82.pdf&siteID=4&str_title=ElimRacKJackson1.pdf

At the conclusion of a Welcome to Country, it is appropriate to provide a short reciprocation, or thanks for the Welcome.

2. An **Acknowledgement of Country** can be given by the leader of an assembly or the chairperson of a meeting at the beginning of the assembly/meeting. The Acknowledgement can be delivered by a non-Indigenous person. Give each student a copy of the reproducible worksheet *Acknowledgement of Country* that invites students to reflect on the following three examples of Acknowledgements.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Elders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia. We must always remember that under the concrete and asphalt this land is, was and always will be traditional Aboriginal land. (This example is from the *Dare to Lead* program.)

Our school was once beautiful forest country, and home to the Aboriginal people of this region. Today we recognise their long history on this land and the care they gave to this land for thousands of years.

I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.

As students complete the worksheet, they will consider some of the issues relevant to developing an Acknowledgement of Country for your school/class.

3. Once students have completed the worksheet, invite them to share their responses in a class discussion. Begin the discussion with the following questions:
 - What is the purpose of using an Acknowledgement of Country at school assemblies or class meetings?
 - Who are the traditional custodians of the land where our school is located?
 - Who could we talk to in order to learn more about local Indigenous culture/s?

4. Encourage the students to identify research tasks that would help to inform the development of an Acknowledgement of Country — for example, talking to Indigenous staff and local community members, visiting local Indigenous cultural centres, reading examples of Acknowledgements of Country developed by local organisations.

When the class has developed a list, allocate tasks to particular students/groups and organise any excursions or visitors to the school that are necessary to action this list.

5. As a class, create an Acknowledgement of Country for use in your school and reflect on how this may contribute to the ongoing process of reconciliation.

Concluding activity

Invite community members to a school/class assembly where the Acknowledgement of Country is used for the first time.

The discussions in this activity may encourage your class to suggest other ways of recognising local Indigenous culture/s in the school. If this happens, be sure to report on the suggestions (and any plans to implement them) at the assembly.

WORKSHEET

Acknowledgement of Country

Read through the following three examples of Acknowledgement of Country:

1. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the Elders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Aboriginal Australia. We must always remember that under the concrete and asphalt this land is, was and always will be traditional Aboriginal land.

(This example is from the *Dare to Lead* program.)

2. Our school was once beautiful forest country, and home to the Aboriginal people of this region. Today we recognise their long history on this land and the care they gave to this land for thousands of years.

3. I would like to acknowledge that this meeting is being held on the traditional lands of the (appropriate group) people.

Which parts of these Acknowledgements do you like most? Why?

Are there any words in these Acknowledgements that you do not like? Which ones? Why?

What ideas do you think could be included in an Acknowledgement of Country for your school/class?

What other suggestions do you have for acknowledging Indigenous people and culture in your school/class?
