



**Teacher Notes**  
***Dark Emu. Black seeds: agriculture or accident***  
**written by Bruce Pascoe**

Teacher Notes prepared by Nola Turner-Jensen

**OVERVIEW**

*Dark Emu. Black seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* puts forward an argument for a reconsideration of the hunter-gatherer tag for pre-colonial Aboriginal Australians. The evidence insists that Aboriginal people right across the continent were using domesticated plants, sowing, harvesting, irrigating and storing – behaviours inconsistent with the hunter-gatherer tag. Rupert Gerritsen and Bill Gammage in their latest books support this premise but Pascoe takes this a step further and challenges the hunter-gatherer tag as a convenient lie.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Bruce Pascoe is a Bunurong man born in the Melbourne suburb of Richmond. He is a member of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria and has been the director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission. Pascoe has had a varied career as a teacher, farmer, fisherman, barman, fencing contractor, lecturer, Aboriginal language researcher, archaeological site worker and editor. In 2013, his novel, *Fog a Dox* won the 2013 Prime Ministers Literary Award for YA Fiction.

**THEMES**

**Indigenous Culture**

Aspects of Indigenous culture are embedded in the text.

- Connection to country and place.
- An innate trust in and respect for tradition.
- Respect for elders, family, rules and community.
- Indigenous languages.
- Indigenous land use and food gathering techniques.

**Pastoral Industry**

- The pastoral industry often mistreated Indigenous people and many pastoralists used force or violent means to run them off their ancestral lands, particularly in prime farming regions.
- The pastoral industry often failed to recognise any traditional ties various Aboriginal groups had to the land.

**Australian History**

- The injustice and discrimination experienced by Indigenous people during colonial times.
- The ingenuity and use of farming techniques by Aboriginal.

- Missions and government departments often did not serve the best interests of Indigenous people.
- Many Indigenous people were displaced from their ancestral lands.

### **WRITING STYLE**

*Dark Emu* combines extensive visual as well as written references from explorer's journals with interviews conducted by the author with local Aboriginal elders and archaeologists and other key traditional owners to present an alternative view of pre-colonial Aboriginal society. *Dark Emu* is not only a fascinating collation of factual accounts relating to Australia's early European pioneers but also highlights the ingenuity and uniqueness of ancient Australian survival techniques in some of the harshest environments on earth. Written in third person, with the author's voice pitching into the narrative, this reference book provides a glimpse of Australia as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people saw it. Its accessibility makes it perfect as reference material for upper secondary Geography and History.

### **LINKS TO THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM**

These notes have been written in context with the Australian Curriculum. The appendix highlights a selection of relevant cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and content descriptors across a range of year levels that the following activities address.

### **CULTURAL NOTES**

An effective way to include Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander information is to regionalise it within your curriculum. Educating your students about their own local history, bringing to life the Indigenous past of your region and using local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (wherever possible) within the school and classroom context is a wonderful way to start.

Australia's ancient people, the Aboriginal people have been proven by archaeologists and anthropologists to have been in Australia for at least 50 thousand years.

Many of the Aboriginal language groups believe they have been in Australia since time began.

The stories that are attached to this belief tell of a time of creation, and that the creation beings that made the animals, people and landscapes were their ancestors. These ancestors still live amongst nature watching and guiding the Aboriginal people where ever they live.

This belief of a creation time or Dreaming explains Aboriginal people's deep connection to their own traditional lands. It is not for the lands value or ownership rights; it is because everything within those lands holds the living essence of their ancestors.

Aboriginal people believe that their land and everything on it is a gift from the ancestors. According to their traditional lore they are responsible for looking

after it. Aboriginal Australians have taken that responsibility most seriously. They have managed to sustain a sometimes harsh and drought-ridden land and its flora and fauna for thousands of years. A remarkable achievement by today's standards.

Aboriginal people believed that the land was alive with gifts from their ancestors. Thus they felt deeply connected to every bush, tree and waterway in a way most people find hard to imagine.

Aboriginal conservation practices were born from:

- traditional ties to special areas (tribal lands) allocated to them.
- survival in landscapes where sources of food were difficult to find at times..
- a belief system that their ancestors provided, ensuring the group did the right thing in all areas of life.

In this text, students will learn how the Aboriginal people of Australia used traditional conservation and land management practices over thousands of years. They will also gain an understanding that in a vast time period only a few native animal and plant species became extinct and that many of those species extinction is believed to have occurred because of huge climactic changes.

For more information regarding the contextualising of this text to your own region, please refer to the following websites:

[www.crackerjackededucation.com.au](http://www.crackerjackededucation.com.au) (Australia's leading Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander education resource website which includes an interactive timeline)

<http://www.crackerjackededucation.com.au/resources/interactive-timeline-1770-1810/>

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/main.html> (The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is the world's premier institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.)

<http://www.12canoes.com.au/> (Twelve Canoes is a website which paints a compelling portrait of the art, culture, history and place of the Yolngu people whose homeland is the town of Ramingining and the Arafura Swamp of north-central Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory.)

### **CLASSROOM IDEAS**

- Discuss the sorts of shelters in their correct regional context, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people would have used in different weather seasons. Find out what seasons the local ATSI people would have used in your area. For example, *on page 86, the people of Cape York and Arnhem Land, where the seasons were divided into the wet and dry,*

usually had two seasonal camps and two different styles of housing. There were large, thatched, waterproofed and domed wet season huts and in the dry they used lighter, more airy buildings.) Australia has vastly contrasting environments and landscapes with different types of natural materials from which to build or make 'homes'. Some environments require(d) the building of more substantial structures.

➤ How might the seasons have affected the types of houses Aboriginal people built?

- , In the past, Aboriginal people didn't build the types of houses we live in today. Why?
- Take a look at the information and activities on the Bureau of Meteorology website about Indigenous weather seasons.  
<http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/walabunnba/index.shtml>  
Compare them to the European seasons that have been adopted in Australia.
- The author, Bruce Pascoe, believes that the early settlers, authorities and explorers did not present the evidence of the farming techniques and established Aboriginal communities because it would have proved previous ownership and usage by Aboriginal people. He believes that this would not have been beneficial for the European settlers in their choice for establishing colonies on prime land areas throughout Australia. Can you think of any other reason why it has not been widely reported previously?
- In what ways would Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples knowledge about native Australian animals help them?
- What knowledge can we take from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people about native animals and plants which will assist in the future protection of plant and animal species, particularly endangered ones? For example, how does knowing whether animals hunt at night or day, what or where they eat, when they have their young etc. help protect a species?
- Research diary entries of early settlers and their relationship with local Aboriginal and/or TSI people. Split the students into two groups; ask one group to write journal entries from the perspective of new English settlers and the other to record the thoughts of traditional Aboriginal and TSI peoples whose land is being taken away or overrun with cattle and sheep. Compare these two views and discuss the implications.
- Investigate the traditional way Aboriginal people farmed or harvested kangaroos and the current status of this primary industry today.
- Visit a local or nearby Aboriginal and/or TSI cultural site and investigate how it is being maintained and managed.
- Research and identify the traditional hunting techniques of Indigenous people living in or around your area.

## Appendix – Links to the Australian Curriculum

Year Level	Subject	Possible Curriculum Content Descriptions
Year 9	History Humanities and Social Sciences Elaborations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. investigating the experiences of a specific group of arrivals to Australia (for example convicts in Sydney, Hobart, Brisbane; or free settlers in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth or Darwin)</li> <li>2. describing the impact of this group on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of the region</li> </ol> URL <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACDSEH084">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACDSEH084</a>	Historical Knowledge and Understanding/Making a Better World?/Movement of peoples (1750 – 1901)
Year 9	Humanities and Social Sciences / History Elaborations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. explaining the effects of contact (for example the massacres of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; their killing of sheep; the spread of European diseases) and categorising these effects as either intended or unintended.</li> <li>2. investigating the forcible removal of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the late nineteenth century/early twentieth century (leading to the Stolen Generations), such as the motivations for the removal of children, the practices and laws that were in place, and experiences of separation.</li> </ol> URL <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACDSEH020">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACDSEH020</a>	Historical Knowledge and Understanding/Australia and Asia/Making a nation
Year 10	Geography Humanities and Social Sciences Elaborations <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. placing in sequence the main events of the Freedom Rides campaigns in the United States and Australia and explaining the links between the two campaigns</li> </ol>	Historical Skills/Chronology, terms and concepts

	<p>2. using interactive timelines to explore the various manifestations or effects of an event in different geographical locations</p> <p>URL  <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHHS182">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHHS182</a></p>	
Year 10	<p>Geography Elaborations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. analysing the likely causes of the environmental change by identifying the biophysical processes involved in the change and the human actions, and their underlying causes, that produce the environmental change, and combining them in a human-environment system examining the consequences of the environmental change</li> <li>2. describing the nature of the environmental change and its effect on the sustainability of the source, sink, service and spiritual functions of the environment</li> </ol> <p>URL  <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHGK073">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHGK073</a></p>	Geographical Knowledge and Understanding /Unit 1: Environmental change and management
Year 10	<p>Humanities and Social Sciences / Geography Elaborations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. researching the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in environmental management</li> <li>2. explaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander models of sustainability that contribute to broader conservation practices</li> </ol> <p>URL  <a href="http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHGK072">http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Elements/ACHGK072</a></p>	Geographical Knowledge and Understanding /Unit 1: Environmental change and management