

Aboriginal water place names

Overview

About the lesson

Students consider the importance of knowledge about water resources in traditional Aboriginal culture and describe the location of WA towns or suburbs with water-based Aboriginal names.

Year level

Year 3 - 5

Learning objectives

Students will:

- Describe the location of WA places with Aboriginal water names.
- Recognise that place names can provide clues about people, events, environments and their uses.
- Consider the variety and uses of natural resources, including water, and the significance of these resources to Aboriginal people.
- Appreciate the importance of water availability, and Aboriginal water knowledge in the context of settlement and exploration.
- Use a map to identify natural and built features of places and the location of WA's Aboriginal language groups.
- Consider the importance of preserving Aboriginal names for places.

Curriculum Links

HASS	
Geography	ACHASSK066
	ACHASSK066
	ACHASSK088
	ACHASSK089
	ACHASSK090
History	ACHASSK113
	ACHASSK062
Science (Chemical)	ACHASSK083
	ACSSU074
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	OI.4
	OI.7
	OI.9

> Lesson Plan

Engage and set the scene

1. Show some images of children on a bushwalk.

Discuss:

- What are these children doing/where are they/ why might they be there?
- How is bushwalking different to walking in a built up area?
- What sort of things make a bushwalk great/ terrible?
- What are some things you need to do or take with you on a bushwalk?
- Can you name any of the plants (or animals) you see in the pictures?
- On a scale of 0-10, how well could you survive in the bush for an extended period of time?

Equipment and Links

[Photos of children on a bushwalk](#)

Explore

1. Discuss: What is a natural resource?

As a class, brainstorm and make a list of natural resources you might find in the bush.

(E.g. wood – thick, thin, soft, hard; tree bark and sap; feathers – large, down; skin – from mammals, reptiles; fur; shells; bones; animal droppings; seeds, roots, fruit and nuts; leaves – broad, large, soft, aromatic; grasses and reeds; stones – sharp, smooth, small, large; mud, clay and sand; water)

Think pair share: If you had to spend a lot of time in the bush, how might these different resources be useful? Be as inventive as you can! (If you have a bush area at or near the school, you might want to complete this activity there instead of in the classroom).

2. Evaluate: Out of all the natural bush resources, which is the MOST important for survival? (water)
3. Research and find out (optional): How long can a person survive without water?

Discuss:

- How do we access water for our daily needs today? (e.g. turn on tap, hose)
- How did people in the past access water? (e.g. dig a well, go to a river)

Explain

1. Discuss:

- Traditionally, Aboriginal people had defined areas of country which they moved across according to the seasons and the availability of natural resources in each place. For example, Whadjuk Noongar people spent the warm summer and early autumn months (the seasons of Birak and Djeran) near the coast, and moved inland towards the hills when the colder weather set in. This allowed the resources in each camping area to recover and regenerate.
- Just like the children in the pictures shown earlier, Aboriginal people 'bushwalked' from place to place. In order to survive, they needed to know where and how to find water along the way. Knowing about plants and animals was important. Not only could these be a source of food but also could offer clues about where the water was e.g. a trail of ants can lead to a reservoir of water inside a tree or underground or the presence of a swamp paperbark indicates that water must be nearby.

2. Show students a list of WA towns and suburbs with Aboriginal names which have a water meaning.

- Places are often named after the features of an area, people who discovered them or events that occurred there. A lot of Aboriginal place names offer clues about the natural resources found there – such as water.
- Places with easy access to water were obvious places to stop and rest. Therefore, place names that refer to water suggest that these suburbs or towns were once popular Aboriginal camping/ living sites.
- When European settlers arrived, they did not understand the land and didn't always know how to find water. When they went out to explore the country, they depended on Aboriginal people to act as guides and trackers to help them find the way and survive in the bush (e.g. Tommy Windich).

Equipment and Links

Video: [Finding water in an arid environment](#)

Video: [Finding water in a dry creek bed](#)

If possible, invite members from the local Aboriginal community to share their knowledge with students.

[WA towns and suburbs with Aboriginal names which have a water meaning.](#)

> Lesson Plan

Extend and elaborate

1. Allocate each student or each pair of students a place name from the WA Aboriginal water place names list.
2. Demonstrate how to use Google Maps
3. Find the location of your water place. Mark your location, and the location of your Aboriginal water place on a blank map of WA.
4. Identify the direction you would need to travel to get there from your school.
5. Find out how long it would take you to a) drive and b) walk there.
6. Work out how many days the journey would take if you walked:
 - 3 hours per day
 - 5 hours per day
 - 8 hours per day
7. Identify places along the way where you could camp and stop off for water (lakes, rivers, swamps). Extra research challenge: find an example of a native species of a plant or animal that could be found nearby and used for food.
8. If you had no plastic, glass or metal containers, is there a way you could carry water with you? Type in 'aboriginal water carrier' into your search engine to find examples of containers that were used. What materials are the carriers made from?
9. Look at some other place names along the way to your chosen water place and visit the Landgate website to find out the history behind these names. European explorers probably used ancient Aboriginal tracks and/or Aboriginal guides to first get to these places. Are there any other places which have Aboriginal names? Are there more Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal place names?
10. As a class, line up according to how far away your place is - from the closest to the furthest away from school.
11. Compare the location of your place to the regional map of WA. Which region is your place located?
12. Compare the location of your place to the map of indigenous Australia. Which Aboriginal language region is your place located? Is it the same region your school is in? What language regions are located to the north, east, west and south of your place? How many different language regions would you need to cross to get from your school to your water place? Extra research challenge: if you were to say 'hello' to Aboriginal people you meet in the different regions, and ask them for 'water', how would you say it in their language?

Equipment and Links

[WA towns and suburbs with Aboriginal names which have a water meaning](#)

Tablets/computers

Internet access

[Blank map of WA](#)

[Landgate: place name history](#)

[Regional map of WA 1](#)

[Regional map of WA 2](#) (includes background information about Aboriginal land councils)

[Map of indigenous Australia](#)

Evaluate and reflect

1. List three things you have learned in today's lesson.

Aboriginal people's knowledge of country, water sources and other resources enabled European exploration and subsequent development of WA. Although some place names are still known today by their Aboriginal names, other places have been given new, non-Aboriginal names (e.g. Derbarl Yerrigan - Swan River).
2. Do you think all WA places should:
 - Be known by their original Aboriginal names?
 - Remain to be known as they are now (some Aboriginal, some non-Aboriginal)?
 - Be listed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal names?
 - Do you have another opinion?Give reasons for your answer.

Lesson Plan

Useful resources

- Australian Bureau of Meteorology (2016). *Indigenous Weather Knowledge*.
<http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/calendars/nyoongar.shtml>
- CSIRO (n.d.). *Indigenous seasons calendars*.
<https://www.csiro.au/en/Research/Environment/Land-management/Indigenous/Indigenous-calendars>
- Book: Hill, Marji (2008). *Peoples of the west*. Heinemann Library, Port Melbourne, Vic
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/version/41822222>
- Landgate (2019). *Place name history*.
<https://www0.landgate.wa.gov.au/maps-and-imagery/wa-geographic-names/name-history>
- Horton, David & Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (issuing body.) (1996). *The AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, [Acton, A.C.T.]
<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>
- Water Corporation
[Water in Aboriginal languages game](#)
- Water Corporation
[Aboriginal Australian languages fact sheet](#)