



First contacts

Key Learning Area	Unit or lesson title and main focus questions	Most appropriate level and suggested number of lessons
 History	First Contacts What was life like for the Aboriginal people of North West Sydney before the arrival of the Europeans? How does the environment support the lives of people and other living things?	Stage 2
 Geography		2 lessons

Teacher briefing

In this lesson students explore what life was like for Aboriginal people before the arrival of Europeans, with a focus on the Sydney region. Students investigate what the natural environment was like and how Aboriginal people made use of the resources around them, managing them sustainably.

Requirements for these lessons

- Interactive whiteboard and internet connection
- Printed or digital copies of Activity Sheets 1 and 2
- Printed or digital images of features of the Bidjigal Reserve, available online at <http://www.bidjigal.org.au/gallery.html>

Assessment

- Any of the individual, pair or group activities in this lesson could be used for assessment and feedback on students' demonstration of target outcomes.

Key terms and vocabulary

Continuity and change, perspectives, environment, sustainability

Syllabus links

History K-10

Stage 2 – First contacts

(HT2-4) describes and explains effects of British colonisation in Australia
(HT2-5) applies skills of historical inquiry and communication.

Geography K-10

Stage 23 – The earth's environment

(GE2-1) examines features and characteristics of places and environments
(GE2-2) describes the ways people, places and environments interact.

Web links



Aborigines in the Hills District

<https://www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/public/library/local-studies/aborigines-in-the-hills-district.pdf>

More detailed teacher background can be found in 'Archaeological evidence of Aboriginal Life in Sydney', by Val Attenbrow, in the *Dictionary of Sydney*, available online at

http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/archaeological_evidence_of_aboriginal_life_in_sydney

ATSIS Map of Aboriginal Australia

<http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aboriginal-australia-map>

Australian Museum, Museum in a Box – Bush Tucker

<http://australianmuseum.net.au/museum-in-a-box-how-to-book>

Behind the News, 'Tree day'

<http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s4278854.htm>

First Australians, Episode 1, Clip 1, 'Life before contact'

<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/first-australians-episode-1/clip1/>

Lycett Album

<http://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/thelycettalbum.pdf>

National Landcare Programme 20 Million Trees

<http://www.nrm.gov.au/national/20-million-trees>

Lesson steps

Step 1 – Darug Country

- Revise from the Stage 2 lesson ‘Who lived in North West Sydney first?’ the idea that Aboriginal people lived all over Australia, in all kinds of environments. Show the map of Aboriginal Australia which can be found at <https://aiatsis.gov.au/aboriginal-studies-press/products/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>
- Zoom to the Sydney region and Darug country. Ask students what they think the environment was like in Darug country before the arrival of Europeans and how it would have been different compared to the way it is today. Record their suggestions on the board
- Show photographs of natural features of the environment from the Bidjigal Reserve website <http://www.bidjigal.org.au/gallery.html> and various online Bidjigal Newsletters and other relevant sites. Allow students to add to their list of suggestions about the environment.

Step 2 – What was life like?

- Ask students what life would have been like for Aboriginal people living in this environment before the arrival of Europeans. Revise from the Stage 1 lesson ‘How do we know?’ about primary sources, written, pictorial and archaeological sources
- Have students access the paintings of Aboriginal people by the convict artist Joseph Lycett, from *The Lycett Album*, available online at <http://www.nla.gov.au/sites/default/files/thelycettalbum.pdf> The colour plates are toward the end of the album and show Aboriginal people engaged in a range of hunting, fishing and ceremonial activities, many of which would have been common in Darug country. Explain that Lycett added the white clothing on Aboriginal people for modesty
- Display Plate 1 ‘An Aborigine Climbing a Tree’, and show students how to observe closely – the steps cut in the trunk, the equipment used, etc. Model how to make notes from the painting, using a frame from Activity sheet 1 (page 104)
- Students work in small groups to look closely at three of the paintings (each group has a different set of three) and write down what they learn from them about Aboriginal life and the environment, using Activity Sheet 1. Groups share their findings with another group
- Class jointly writes an information report about what life was like for Aboriginal people, using information from the Lycett paintings. Aspects could include shelter, canoes, tools and weapons, hunting and fishing, cooking etc
- Review images of archaeologists engaged in the excavation of Aboriginal sites and some of the objects uncovered from Sydney Metro Northwest Archaeological Program viewed in former lesson ‘Who was here first and how do we know?’ Explain that these excavations have shown that Aboriginal people have lived in the North West Sydney region for at least 4,000 years. The artefacts found in the excavations show the types of stone tools that were made and even how they were made
- Teacher leads guided reading of the first two sections of the article *Aborigines of the Hills District*, ‘The Cumberland Plain’ and ‘Culture and Diet’. Explain how archaeologists interpret the things they find to build a picture of what life was like. Remind students that the objects archaeologists find and the paintings and descriptions done by early British observers are sources that provide evidence about how Aboriginal people lived.

Step 3 – Sustainability: taking care of country

- Ask students what they understand of the concept 'sustainability'. Display on smartboard the following definitions of sustainability

Definitions of sustainability

Sustainability is about taking what we need to live now, without endangering the potential for people in the future to meet their needs.

Sustainability is the requirement of our generation to manage resources so that the quality of life we enjoy can be shared by future generations.

Sustainability is the quality of not being harmful to the environment or depleting natural resources, thereby supporting long-term ecological balance.

Sustainability is the ongoing capacity of the Earth to maintain life, including the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

- Read and discuss definitions with students. Have students choose a definition they understand, or create a class definition
- Ask students to give examples of practices encouraging sustainability they know of today from home, school or community, for example re-using and recycling; using worm farms or composting; avoiding unnecessary waste such as plastic bottles, planting trees. Explain that these practices help us take care of the Earth's resources, so there will be some left for the future
- Explain that Aboriginal people believed in 'taking care of country' which included taking care of the land, water, plants and animals so that there would be enough for themselves and for future generations. Students complete Activity Sheet 2 (page 105), by describing the effect of each practice
- Using information from completed Activity Sheet 2, students write a paragraph about how Aboriginal management practices contributed to the sustainability of their environment
- Show First Australians, Episode 1, Clip 1, 'Life before contact' and have students discuss the points made about the sustainability of the Aboriginal way of life.
<http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/first-australians-episode-1/clip1/>

Step 4 – Learning from the past

- Explain to students that today people realise just how important trees are for a healthy environment. View recent Behind the News story on Tree Day to hear students talk about the benefits of trees <http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s4278854.htm>
- The Australian Government is planning to restore some of the vegetation that has been lost over the last 200 years by planting 20 million trees. Have students access information about the project, beginning with the website <http://www.nrm.gov.au/national/20-million-trees>

Extension activities

- Borrow from the Australian Museum 'Museum in a Box – Bush Tucker' which contains a range of bush food specimens, resources, information and activities. You need to book months in advance. See <http://australianmuseum.net.au/museum-in-a-box> for booking details.

Activity sheet 1

Aboriginal Management Practices

Instructions

Beside each management practice, write the effect it would have on the environment.

Management practice	Effect on the environment
People lived in groups of 20 to 40 who moved from place to place within their country, according to the seasons and the food available.	
Their diet was varied. It included yams, fruit, berries, seeds, fish, shellfish, honey, insects, birds, mammals and reptiles.	
There were strict laws against killing the young of any species, and against killing females still raising their young.	
The 'take some, leave some' principle was practised. Not all food was taken from a nest, yam bed or tree and not all fish, eels or yabbies were taken from a creek or waterhole.	
Fire was used to burn off old vegetation and encourage new grasses which would attract wallabies and other animals to be hunted for food.	
Kinship with the natural world meant that some animals were considered spirit brothers and sisters (totems). People did not hunt or harm their totems.	



Northwest

Activity sheet 2

Observations Skills

Name of painting

What does the painting show about Aboriginal life?

Name of painting

What does the painting show about Aboriginal life?

Name of painting

What does the painting show about Aboriginal life?



Northwest