

# Teacher notes

Connection to Country



This education resource was created in partnership with Reconciliation Australia.



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Any questions? Contact [sbslearn@sbs.com.au](mailto:sbslearn@sbs.com.au)



# 1. About the Documentary

My own notes

## About the Documentary

*Connection to Country* follows the Indigenous people of the Western Australian Pilbara's battle to preserve Australia's 50,000-year-old cultural heritage from the ravages of a booming mining industry. The Pilbara region sits in the Burrup Peninsula (or Murujuga) and is host to the largest concentration of rock art in the world, dating back over 50,000 years. It's a dramatic and ancient landscape so sacred that some parts shouldn't be looked upon at all, except by Traditional Owners. Director, Tyson Mowarin shows the waves of industrialisation and development that threaten sites all over the region, and how he and the people of the Pilbara are fighting back by documenting the rock art, recording sacred sites and battling to get their unique cultural heritage recognised, recorded and celebrated.

Produced by Weerianna Street Media.



# 2. About the Resource

## About the Resource

This SBS Learn resource is shaped around three short clips from the *Connection to Country* documentary film. While the stand-alone clips have been selected to serve as meaningful stimuli for classroom learning, teachers and students are also encouraged to consider them in the context of viewing the full-length documentary.





## 3. Curriculum Links

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### Curriculum Links

The documentary film, *Connection to Country*, and the classroom resources are closely linked to the following Australian Curriculum Content Descriptions:

#### Humanities and Social Sciences

Year 3 ([ACHASSK066](#))

Year 4 ([ACELT1806](#)) ([ACHASSK083](#)) ([ACHASSK086](#)) ([ACHASSK089](#)) ([ACHASSK092](#)) ([ACHASSK093](#))

Year 5 ([ACHASSK112](#))

Year 6 ([ACHASSK135](#))

Year 7 ([ACHASSK188](#))

Year 8 ([ACHCK064](#))

Year 10 ([ACHCK093](#))

#### Health and Physical Education

Year 7-8 ([ACPPS078](#))

Year 9-10 ([ACPPS097](#))

#### Science

Year 7 ([ACSHE121](#))/([ACSHE136](#)) ([ACSHE223](#)) ([ACTDEK029](#))

#### English

Year 9-10 ([Elaboration \(4\) ACAMAR078](#))

#### Media Arts

Year 7-8 ([ACAMAR072](#))

Year 9-10 ([ACAMAR078](#)) ([Elaboration \(4\) ACAMAR078](#))

Year 9 ([Elaboration \(3\) ACELT1633](#))

You can download a document containing the [full curriculum descriptors here](#).

Each of these Content Descriptions and/or their Elaborations are explicitly tied to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures](#) cross-curriculum priority. Teachers are encouraged to consider how they may be able to adopt and adapt the suggested classroom activities outlined below to suit further subject areas and/or year levels.



## 4. Recommendations before viewing in the classroom

My own notes

### Recommendations before viewing in the classroom

As with all resources, teachers are encouraged to watch *Connection to Country* and the associated clips before showing them to students. The content addresses some significant themes and it is important for teachers to feel comfortable with the content before introducing it in the classroom.

- Talk, if possible, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, staff, families and/or community members before using these learning resources. *Connection to Country* raises themes that may be sensitive for students, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Considering and pre-empting possible responses is very important. Because of the often distinct, place-based nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities and community relationships, it can also be significant to explore the concept of connecting to Country from your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community perspective.
- Set classroom ground rules: Due to the potentially sensitive nature of some of the content in *Connection to Country*, setting classroom ground rules with your students before viewing is an important step in creating a safe space and helping develop mutual respect and understanding between the members of your classroom community.

#### Examples of Classroom Ground Rules

**Be respectful:** Each person has their own beliefs and values.

**Value diversity:** Each person has their own world views, experiences and opinions.

**Listen politely:** Each person has a right to contribute without pressure or intimidation.

**Act with honour and courage:** Be brave in sharing experiences, ideas and opinions.

**Appreciate privacy:** Each person has the right to uphold their privacy.

**Act responsibly:** Share feedback with thoughtful consideration and a positive attitude towards others.

As each classroom is unique, add any further rules that may be required.

Other ideas for consideration:

- Encourage students to frame discussion comments as their own (as in “I think”) and avoid forceful language (such as “you should”). Also encourage students to draw on evidence from their viewing, and from further critical research, in shaping their responses – engaging with diverse perspectives, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is key to formulating strong understandings and responses.
- When responding to others in classroom discussion or within the associated activities, encourage students to challenge *ideas* rather than people.





## 4. Recommendations before viewing in the classroom continued

- Allow adequate time at the end of each viewing session to debrief the content, discussion and associated activities.

For further guidance around fostering safe and respectful learning environments, visit the below sources from Reconciliation Australia's [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning](#) online platform:

- [Cultural Safety and Respect in the Classroom](#)
- [Guide to Using Respectful and Inclusive Language and Terminology](#)

My own notes



## 5. Activities

My own notes

### Clip 1: Impact of Industry



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following:

- In this film clip, Ngarluma man Patrick Churnside articulates, *"We live with the Country. We grow with the Country. From a white man's perspective, all they want to see is to benefit from the Country – take, take, take and take – whereas we'll only take what we need... You've got to have a balance with the Ngurra and, in return, you know, Country will look after you."*

Why is it important for non-Indigenous Australians to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their perspectives relating to Country?

- When referring to the lands, waterways and skies with which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples maintain a traditional and continuing custodial relationship, it is respectful to write about "Country" with a capital "C." What do you think are some of the subtle but significant differences between the meaning of (lower-case) "country" in standard English, and the meaning of (capitalised) "Country" according to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives? Consider comparing a state/territory boundary map of Australia to [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander linguistic/geo-cultural maps](#) as a further stimulus for this discussion.
- The film clip touches on the context of colonial policies and practices that were created to *"deny Aboriginal people's existence,"* as well as to deny their longstanding connection to Country. What are some of the intergenerational impacts of unjust colonial policies and practices of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their Country, cultures and communities? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Where possible, set time aside for students to carry out some further critical research to support their engagement with this class discussion question.



## 5. Activities continued

### My own notes

- Consider the impacts of inequitable relationships between resource companies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as echoed through the line, “*We negotiated an agreement to build the [gas] plant away from our sacred sites, but the resource companies went ahead anyway...*”
- Why is it important to acknowledge the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures in the context of these histories? How might a stronger understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ connection to Country help to support reconciliation in Australia?
- This film clip ends with the rhetorical question, “*Do they really want to destroy what’s been here for over 40,000 years?!*” Many of the world’s most famous monuments – Stonehenge, the Pyramids and the Great Wall of China – are comparatively recent compared to the rock art sites of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. What are some strong arguments for why these rock art sites should be considered sites of protection and pride for all Australians?
- Who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land and Waterways on which you live and learn? Are you aware of any local sites of significance for your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community? Why is it important to [acknowledge Country](#) and the Elders and Traditional Owners of your local area, and to respect and protect local sites of significance?

### Activity

Encourage each student to reflect on a place that is special to them, their family and/or their community, supporting students to think about how both written and visual language can help to articulate feelings, attitudes and ideas. Guide students to develop a personal creative piece (short story, poem or artwork) that expresses the significance of their chosen place. Provide opportunities for students to share their reflections and creative representations with each other by proudly displaying completed works in your classroom, and by encouraging students to:

- describe their chosen place, and their relationship with it;
- explain why this place is special to them, their family and/or their community;
- justify why they think it is important for all people to respect and protect this place;
- demonstrate how their creative piece was designed to help to express the above.

Upon completing this activity, facilitate a class discussion around why it is special and important for all Australians to develop meaningful—even if diverse—connections to Country/place.



### Clip 2: Sacred Sites



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following kinds of questions:

- In this clip we see an example of effective communication between two pastoralists/grader drivers and local Aboriginal Traditional Owners. The clip also ends with the voice of the Spirit of the Country articulating, “I’ll look after you. If you look after me.”

Why do you think it is important to foster genuine two-way relationships between people and Country, as well as between non-Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples? What are some of the elements or “ingredients” of a meaningful two-way relationship?

- The Spirit of the Country represents one of the key characters in *Connection to Country*. How does this filmic technique help to highlight that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Country is understood to be a sentient (living and feeling) entity with which one can actively extend important, interpersonal relationships?
- Although translated into English subtitles, the voice of the Spirit of the Country that we hear at the end of this clip is spoken in the local Ngarluma language. What is the connection between language and Country, and why is this connection important to appreciate?
- In the interaction that this film clip shows between Tyson Mowarin and his Auntie Jean, audiences are given a brief insight into the importance of storytelling as a means of articulating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ connection to Country, and transmitting important cultural knowledges across generations. How can the contemporary medium of film be meaningfully adopted or adapted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a significant storytelling device?



## 5. Activities continued

- In reference to sites of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Tyson Mowarin expresses, *"We believe a lot of these things are something non-Indigenous Australia should be proud of too."*

How and why is it important to recognise and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sites of significance, and the respectful relationships that people share with these sites, as part of Australia's reconciliation journey?

### Activity

Encourage students to develop a flow chart, diagram or other visual representation that highlights some of the respectful and sustainable ways in which people can care for Country/place, and in which Country/place cares for people in turn. Prompt students to think about the physical nourishment (natural resources, food, shelter and warmth etc...) as well as the personal, cultural and spiritual nourishment that Country can provide.

To guide their work, students may also wish to reflect on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attitudes and approaches to caring for Country reflected in the *Connection to Country* film clips, and engaged with through further careful and critical research.

My own notes



### Clip 3: The Big Picture



#### Reflective/Discussion Questions

After viewing the above film clip, encourage students to reflect on, and respectfully discuss, the following questions:

- The term 'heritage' is generally used to refer to something that has been handed down from the *past*. In the context of thinking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage sites, why is it important to appreciate the significance of these sites to past, present and future cultural and community life alike?
- This film clip includes a parodic comparison of registered colonial built heritage and unregistered Aboriginal cultural heritage. One of Tyson Mowarin's comments in this sequence is, *"This is listed as a heritage site, but all it is is an air vent from the old sewerage system. It's street furniture, but this street furniture has got more protection than Aboriginal heritage sites... this thing here is protected by State heritage and, funnily enough, it's right here next to the Department of Indigenous Affairs."* Other critical comments such as *"It's got no song"* further build the sentiments of this sequence.

What are some of the many ironies highlighted in this film sequence and in the above statements? What do these ironies indicate about some of the inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to the protection of Country and cultural heritage? Why is acknowledging and working towards ameliorating these kinds of inequalities or inequities important to reconciliation in Australia?



## 5. Activities continued

### My own notes

- Tyson continues by expressing, *"Sometimes I feel really disheartened that built heritage receives more protection than Aboriginal heritage, when a 5000-year-old Aboriginal site also tells the human story."*

Why is a focus on humanity and 'the human story' important to building stronger relationships of respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

#### Activity

Encourage each student to imagine that he/she is working in the role of a Cultural Heritage Lawyer. Based on their viewing and further research, students can be prompted to prepare case notes and arguments for: *How and why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and sites of significance could/should be better respected and protected under the [Aboriginal Heritage Act](#).*

Guide students to consider or pre-empt possible counter-arguments and how they could convincingly rebut these. The following quotes from the full-length documentary film may further support students in shaping their arguments:

- *"It's no wonder there's a sense of urgency right across the Pilbara, right across the state. Because there's a fear from our old people—our Elders—that our heritage isn't being respected. In 2014, the Government began trying to make amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act so they could fast-track approvals for mining and resource companies to destroy sites."* (Tyson Mowarin)
- *"Aboriginal people have been denied in nearly every aspect of our lives, starting 229 years ago. The British Government denied that there were people here, that there was a culture here. Now, the way the native title system is designed, it makes us feel that we're being denied again because we have to prove that we have a connection to Country. What more proof do you need?! We haven't come from anywhere else. Aboriginal people have been here from the beginning."* (Tyson Mowarin)
- *"In Australia we should treat our Aboriginal heritage and our white heritage at least on the same level, at least on a par, but we don't. We always put forward our white heritage as being more important than our Aboriginal heritage."* (Anthropologist Nic Green)

Once each student has prepared his/her individual arguments and evidence, collate these to construct a whole-class casefile display wall. Discuss, as a class, how the combined arguments and evidence help to highlight the need to better respect and protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sites of significance, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' connections to these places.



## 6. Further Resources

My own notes

### Further Resources

- [Connection to Country: A Study Guide by Bernice Barry](#)

Published by Weerianna Street Media in June 2017, the resources contained in this Study Guide are designed to support staff and students' engagement with the full-length Connection to Country documentary film.

- [Welcome to Country app](#)

Produced by the same production company behind *Connection to Country*, Weerianna Street Media, the Welcome to Country iPhone app delivers a simple Welcome to Country video introduction to Australian Indigenous cultures, including basic cultural protocols that are geoculturally-specific. The app is currently populated with content from more than 30 (of 250+) Aboriginal Language groups from across Australia, with the aim to continue to add more Language groups over time.

- [Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Schools and Early Learning](#)

Reconciliation Australia's *Narragunnawali* platform aims to create a community of positive and engaged schools and early learning services that are committed to promoting reconciliation between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Narragunnawali* is designed to support all schools and early learning services to develop environments that foster a higher level of knowledge and pride in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and contributions. The cost-free professional learning and curriculum resources listed under the following reconciliation Action pages may be of particular relevance and significance in exploring some of the key content and themes of *Connection to Country*:

- [Acknowledgement of Country](#)
- [Welcome to Country](#)
- [Local Sites, Events and Excursions](#)

The following curriculum resources are of particular relevance, and could be considered Extension Activities to complement students' learning around the three film clips above:

- My Acknowledgement of Country ([Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) year level):
- Paul Kelly & Kev Carmody - "This Land is Mine" ([Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) year level)
- Who We Are: Caring for Country ([Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) year level):
- Languages Map Activity ([Primary](#) and [Secondary](#) year level):
- Paul Kelly & Kev Carmody – From Little Things Big Things Grow ([Primary](#) and





## 6 Further Resources

### continued

### My own notes

Secondary year levels):

#### More from SBS Learn...

- [Servant or Slave](#): Using first person accounts and reconstructions this documentary gives a powerful insight into the domestic servitude forced upon Aboriginal women in 20th Century Australia. English, History and Aboriginal Studies Y9-12
- [First Contact](#): Gain a deeper understanding of: Impacts of colonisation, Race relations, Connection to Country and National identity with these resources accompanying the SBS Series
- [My Grandmothers Lingo](#): Voice-activated SBS interactive: one woman's fight to save her Indigenous language. After a Walkley and a SXSW award in 2016, it has now won a Webby. Take it into the classroom with SBS Learn curriculum linked resources.