

Deadly Arts

Frequently Asked Questions



Questions about The Song Room's Deadly Arts Programs

What is The Song Room's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts education?

The Song Room is committed to reconciliation and recognises and respects the significance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' communities, cultures and histories. The Song Room's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy clearly outlines this commitment and is based on the principles of reciprocity, self-determination, equitable education and employment, ethical research, cultural competency, informed policy development and respect, recognition and acknowledgment. This policy can be viewed on our [website](#).

What is The Song Room's Deadly Arts program?

The Song Room delivers Deadly Arts, its specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program, in primary schools across Australia. Led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teaching Artists, these programs respond to the needs of the schools and communities in which they are based and may differ from one Indigenous sovereign nation to the next. Teaching Artists lead engaging community arts projects and sequential arts learning sessions to support safe and culturally responsive collaborations with students, teachers, parents and local community members. The Deadly Arts collection on ARTS:LIVE features Noongar Teaching Artists from The Song Room's Deadly Arts programs in Western Australia.

If you are interested in The Song Room's Deadly Arts programs for your school, please [contact us](#).



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Questions about the curriculum

What does the Australian Curriculum say about teaching First Nations content?

The Australian Curriculum outlines two distinct goals in relation to teaching First Nations content:

1. That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are able to see themselves, their identities and their cultures reflected in the Curriculum of each of the learning areas, can fully participate in the Curriculum and can build their self-esteem
2. That the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority is designed for all students to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures.

As a cross-curriculum priority, First Nations content should be embedded across all Learning Areas. The Arts provide teachers with significant opportunities to bring diverse First Nations perspectives into the classroom. As the curriculum states:

Students' exploration of traditional and contemporary artworks by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples provides insight into the way the relationships between People, Culture and Country/Place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples can be conveyed through the arts, their expression in living communities, and the way these build Identity.

Find out more about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures cross-curriculum priority areas [here](#) including key concepts and organising ideas.

Questions about language

How do I know what terminology I should use when talking to students about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, languages and places?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia. The language used to describe First nations peoples, languages and places is equally diverse. This means that language used in curriculum documents, educational resources and across different schools and communities is variable and this can be confusing for teachers. Remember that language is culturally, historically and socially embedded. It powerfully shapes our perceptions and impacts our feelings, thoughts and actions. It is important to do your research and make sure you understand why certain terms might be considered offensive. General tips include:

- Always seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in your school or community regarding preferences and protocols around language use. Do not make assumptions (e.g. not all older people are Elders).
- The term First Nations is respectful as it encompasses the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities and shows recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the sovereign peoples of Australia.
- Use plurals to acknowledge diversity (e.g. peoples, histories, cultures).
- Use specific language to denote identity and connection to Country (e.g. Kulin Nations, Whadjuk Nyoongar woman).
- Avoid broad categories as they are homogenous and not inclusive of the diversity of cultures and identities across Australia (e.g. Indigenous, Aboriginal). Note also that if you just use 'Aboriginal'

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- you exclude 'Torres Strait Islander peoples' and vice versa.
- Use capital letters to demonstrate respect (e.g. Elders, Traditional Custodians, First Nations, Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander). Note that 'Country' or corresponding terms such as 'Land' should be capitalised when referring to a specific place associated with a distinct First Nations community.
- Avoid acronyms as these are dehumanising (e.g. ATSI).
- Use 'people' when referring to a single geo-cultural community and 'peoples' when referring to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander geo-cultural community groups across Australia.
- Remember that language and culture are living things. They evolve and change over time. First Nations languages are usually part of an oral tradition and there are not always agreed ways to spell and write words down.
- Use language as a discussion point with students – help them understand why it matters and how it connects to concepts such as respect, recognition and reconciliation.

Questions about respectful teaching

How can teachers be culturally responsive and appropriate?

1. Be an inquirer

Create a culture of respectful curiosity in your classroom. Model an inquiry approach and demonstrate how to ask thoughtful questions, respectfully engage community members and access quality resources in your learning community. You don't have to have all the answers. Instead, learn *with* your students by creating time and space for listening, connecting and reflecting on diverse perspectives together.

"There has been a long period in our history, in which the inclusion of Aboriginal voices and knowledge were omitted from the general public and education system. So, it is now so important, and highly appreciated, when people engage with our cultures and learn about our shared history... Our cultures are so rich and we have so much to share, and it's fantastic when people want to learn."

(Rickeeta Walley, Noongar Teaching Artist)

2. Connect to Country

First Nations peoples have much to teach students about sustainability and caring for Country. Encourage your students and colleagues to connect with the Country they live, learn and work upon. Make the most of outdoor learning spaces and encourage students to explore the sounds, sights and treasures in the natural world around them. Find out about the seasons on your Country and plant native gardens upon the advice of local Elders of First Nations community groups. Create art in nature, without disturbing plants and animals. This could include drawing in sand, making sculptures from fallen sticks and leaves or recording nature sounds as the basis for a composition.

"Connection to Country is our belonging, we care for Country, we don't own Country, Country owns us. In our hearts it's very sacred, we are the caretakers. Everything about Country is very important - following nature, knowing the six seasons, what is abundant, what is to be left alone."

(Marcelle Riley, Noongar Teaching Artist)

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3. Acknowledge Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is an act of respect and recognition for the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which your school sits. Encourage your students and colleagues to think about what it means to acknowledge Country and invite them to create their own personal acknowledgments that can be shared at the start of the school day, in meetings and at events throughout the year.

"It's really important to understand why we do an Acknowledgement of Country. This was Aboriginal land first so an acknowledgment is a sign of respect... If we teach kids the reason why it's done, they grow up understanding it and can let other people know."

(Merindah Hansen, Noongar Language Teacher)

4. Keep language alive

Australia has more than 250 Indigenous languages including 800 dialects, specific to a particular place and people. More than 90% of these languages are considered endangered.

Make every effort to learn about the First Nations languages that are unique to your area. Languages are living things and when they die, so too do the stories, songs and knowledge of the oldest surviving culture on earth. Consider ways that you can help preserve, strengthen and acknowledge First Nations languages. This could include updating signage in your school, employing a First Nations language teacher, creating a school Acknowledgement song with a local community member and embedding First Nations words into your classroom practice (e.g. using numbers or animal words for class/house groups).

"My generation of people and my mother's people weren't allowed to speak their language. Our own parents and grandparents weren't allowed to speak it. This generation have the opportunity to learn their language and get it back. I encourage all young people to learn the language from the Country that they are on. Language is part of culture, it's our DNA, our ancestry. If children learn dance and language and ceremony they will soon find themselves – their whole selves."

(Della Rae Morrison, Teaching Artist)

5. Lift up First Nations voices

Listen and connect with First Nations people in your school and local community. Non-Indigenous people do not have authority to speak about certain aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, and cannot speak for or about the experiences of First Nations people. Include resources in your curriculum and learning environment that introduce students to First Nations voices through culturally appropriate books, artwork, videos and music. Invite parents, community members and local Elders into your classroom to lead learning and seek their advice to create culturally safe and appropriate learning.

"The best way to do it is to have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people lead the work because cultural knowledge is best used in our hands. There are much deeper cultural and economic factors that non-indigenous people encroach on when creating this type of content."

(Tyrown Waigana, Teaching Artist)

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6. Share stories and walk together

Respect the stories of your school community members and create opportunities to yarn and walk together. Be an ally and encourage your school to create a [Reconciliation Action Plan](#). Help your school community to develop inclusive policies and whole-school approaches that are culturally responsive and respectful. This could include: whole school celebrations for NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks, cultural competency training for parents and staff, displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, ensuring First Nations people are represented on school committees and school garden projects that promote caring for Country.

“Respect that everyone has their own story, their own connection to land, connection to family and community. Story telling is important because you feel like it's something that belongs to you - it's your story. You can go anywhere. You share with others, and they will share their story. Story telling brings you down to earth. It's relaxing. It's healing.”

(Yolande Yarran-Ward, Teaching Artist)

Questions about further resources

What further resources can help me learn more?

[The National Australian Curriculum](#)

The National Australian Curriculum, published by ACARA, recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in its standards framework as a cross-curricular priority. Information for teachers about key concepts and organising ideas can be found on the curriculum website, as well as strategies for embedding First Nations perspectives in every subject area.

[Australia Council for the Arts: Indigenous Protocols](#)

The Australia Council for the Arts has produced five protocol guides which set out the legal, ethical and moral considerations for the use of Indigenous material. The protocol guides endorse the rights of Indigenous people to own and control their cultural heritage. These rights are confirmed in the 2007 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The five guidelines relate to media arts, music, performing arts, visual arts and writing.

[Teaching First Nations Content and Concepts, by Ibijerri Theatre Company and Drama Victoria](#)

Written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, artists, Elders and theatre directors, this is a comprehensive set of protocols for teaching First Nations content in the drama classroom. These protocols, founded in cultural responsiveness and authenticity, can be adapted for other art forms and provide excellent guidelines for teachers. Reconciliation Action Plan resources can also be found through the Drama Victoria link above.

[Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education](#)

This website contains excellent resources to support teachers to introduce reconciliation initiatives in their classrooms, schools and communities.

Take time to read and refer to your local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander educational protocols associated with your State or Territory's education setting for working effectively with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.