kanalaritja
AN UNBROKEN STRING

TEACHER’S GUIDE
kanalaritja.tmag.tas.gov.au

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Visions of Australia
Acknowledgements

This teachers’ guide has been developed to accompany the kanalantja: An Unbroken String exhibition touring from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG).

Written by Theresa Sainty

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Cover images:
(Top) Courtesy Lucia Rossi.
(Bottom) Artist: Ashlee Murray. King marina.

Please note: The shells used in these necklaces can only be collected by Tasmanian Aboriginal people. They are protected under the Living Marine Resources Act 1995.

Disclaimer

Any links to websites that have been included in this guide are provided for your convenience only. TMAG does not accept any responsibility for the accuracy or availability of any information or services on any other website.
Introduction

The kanalaritja: An Unbroken String exhibition is a celebration of survival, of a people and their culture across generations. It is a tribute to the Ancestral women of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, who, despite the upheaval they experienced from being removed from their people and country, continued shell stringing, strong Aboriginal women who saw to it that the knowledge was passed on, and ultimately survived, and who are the matriarchs of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

This guide is designed to support educators to include Aboriginal content, with a focus on Tasmania, in their learning programs, and has been developed to accompany the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String exhibition designed and developed by the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG).

Suggested learning opportunities, inquiry questions and teaching ideas are generally aimed towards Years 5-9 but can be adapted for younger or older students. Many of the external resources and websites that are referenced here are designed for students of all ages and are suitable for teacher reference.

The key focus is the Australian Curriculum Cross Curriculum Priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Using the Organising Ideas (OIs) as the framework, suggested curriculum links are made throughout the Guide by including relevant content descriptions (also see an outline of how the Key Ideas fit within the Learning Areas). The content descriptions are hyperlinked to the Elaborations.

For the purpose of this guide, sometimes the OIs have been ‘grouped’ together where there is a discernable connection, i.e. OIs 1, 4 and 7 are all related to the People and the diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and cultures.

This is not a definitive list of curriculum links, however. There are many more opportunities across the Curriculum to further explore the diversity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, particularly in the Languages Framework.

In this guide, teachers are directed to videos, websites and classroom activities via hyperlinks in the text to support students.

The kanalaritja: An Unbroken String website is a useful resource to use as an introduction to the exhibition for students. The Exhibition section gives an overview of the importance of exhibitions such as this with regard to Aboriginal communities, and maintenance of culture. A brief history of shell stringing can be found under History. See some of the beautiful necklaces on display in the exhibition, in the Makers section. Access some resources, including a Media Kit, and a selection of exhibition images in Resources.

The kanalaritja: An Unbroken String documentary film is another rich resource. More information can be found here.

Teacher note: It would be an advantage if you visit the exhibition and look at the website in order to familiarize yourself with content before taking your class. Some of the activities suggested in the ‘at the exhibition’ sections involve using writing materials. Please check with the exhibition venue which writing materials are permitted.

The exhibition touring schedule is here.

“Shell stringing is a celebration of culture and a symbol of identity – an unbroken string that connects the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community, to Ancestors, culture and Country.”

http://kanalaritja.tmag.tas.gov.au/history/

Prior to visiting the exhibition:
Establish whether there are any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students in the group/class. They may be able to provide a unique perspective from having been immersed in their community and culture.

Tuning in:
Discuss what students think they know about Tasmanian Aborigines and particularly shell stringing. Students can record answers/discussion points on the table kanalaritja KWL (Appendix 1) to identify what they (think they) Know, what they Would like to know, and what they have Learned (after their visit to the exhibition).

Have students either individually or as a class, visit the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String website, particularly the section about the Makers.

Suggested discussion points/activities:
• What does ‘unbroken string’ refer to?
• What language is ‘kanalaritja’, and what does it mean?
• Have students choose one Maker that he/she will find at the exhibition, and make a list of questions they will try to answer when they visit the exhibition.
Australian Curriculum

First Nations people across Australia

**OI.1** Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and within those groups there is significant diversity.

**OI.4** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups.

**OI.7** The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia.

**Australia Curriculum – Content descriptions**

**HASS Y 5:** Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues and phenomena in the past and present. (ACHASSI099)

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Explore connections between identity and cultural values and beliefs and the expression of these connections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages [Key concepts: Country/Place, cultural expression and transmission, values, beliefs, spirituality; Key processes: observing, making connections, discussing, investigating] (ACLFWU171)

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Explore the language situation of language communities and the diversity of language contexts in Australia [Key concepts: change, sign, context; Key processes: recognising, discussing, investigating] (ACLFWU169)

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Recognise that languages change over time [Key concepts: regional languages, language shift, language loss, borrowing, relatedness; Key processes: identifying, recognising, comparing] (ACLFWU168)

**Languages framework Y 7-10:** Describe and reflect on how languages change over time and influence one another [Key concepts: contact, change; Key processes: exploring, observing, reflecting] (ACLFWU190)

Before 1788 the continent now known as Australia supported many different Language Groups, or Nations. This guide focuses on lutruwita (Tasmania) because the exhibition is specific to Tasmanian Aborigines and their culture, i.e. shell stringing. There are many opportunities for comparison of cultural practices between different Aboriginal communities, Torres Strait Islander people and other Indigenous peoples of the world.

Since invasion, however, everything changed for Aborigines. All aspects of life have been, and continue to be impacted on, including language. Before 1803 lutruwita supported at least nine different Language Groups or Nations; it now has one language, palawa kani.

palawa kani is a ‘reclamation language’, or a ‘revived language’ (see Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages – LR). The Tasmanian Aboriginal community has been reviving language since the early 1990s, and the first ever palawa kani dictionary was published in 2013. Find out more about palawa kani from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) website.
Pre visit

- Compare the Map of Australian Language Groups with a map of Europe, to establish an understanding of the concept of borders, different languages and customs both within an Australian and European context.
- Compare the Map of Australian Language Groups with the Tasmanian Map of Language Groups (Appendix 2) to establish an understanding of the concept of borders, different languages and customs both within Australia and lutruwita and Europe.

Suggested discussion topics:

- The diversity of languages in Tasmania before invasion. (See Appendix 3 for an explanation of the use of the word invasion.)
- The use of the word ‘invasion’ to describe European arrival in Australia.
- What do you think life was like for Aborigines (in lutruwita) before the arrival of Europeans?
- What do you think happened to the original people?
- Which languages do Tasmanian Aborigines speak today?

At the exhibition

- There are a number of palawa kani words throughout the exhibition. Have students make a list of as many palawa kani words, and their meanings, as they can.
- Ask students to identify the language/s they can hear in the film projected on to the wall at the exhibition.

Post visit

Suggested activities:

- Have students compare/cross check their lists of palawa kani words, and make a composite class list. (This process is similar to the way some of the recorders of the original Tasmanian Aboriginal languages cross-checked wordlists).
- Discuss the use of palawa kani. Is the general public allowed to learn palawa kani? Why or why not?
- Discuss the diversity of languages within the class, and mark where they are spoken on a world map.
- Research which places in Tasmania are named under the Aboriginal and Dual Naming Policy 2012. Using the Map identifying Dual Naming in Tasmania. Identify and make a list of place names that are written in palawa kani.
- Students can write a persuasive essay, or debate why they think (or don’t think) it is important to reflect the original names of places.
- Discuss how Europeans named places in Australia. Compare with how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples name places.
- Discuss the diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and dual naming and/or re-naming of places in other Australian states (e.g. Uluru).
- Have students read and discuss (p. 5-6) Tasmanian places and Tasmanian Aboriginal language.
- Using a map of Tasmania identify as many Aboriginal place words as possible. Are they original Aboriginal names of places? Who named them?
## Connection to Country

**OI.2** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place.

**OI.3** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have holistic belief systems and are spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.

### Australian Curriculum – Content descriptions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>HASS Y 5:</th>
<th>The influence of people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, on the environmental characteristics of Australian places (ACHASSK112)</th>
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<tr>
<td>HASS Y 7:</td>
<td>The influence of social connectedness and community identity on the liveability of places (ACHASSK191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography Y 8:</td>
<td>Spiritual, aesthetic and cultural value of landscapes and landforms for people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACHGK049)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages Framework Y 3-6:</td>
<td>Gather, organise and compare information from a range of sources relating to Country/Place, community and past and present ways of living (ACLFWC026)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages Framework Y 7-10:</td>
<td>Investigate, analyse and synthesise information obtained from a range of sources on topics and issues related to their Country/Place and community. [Key concepts: change, social and environmental issues, community initiatives/projects, health and well-being; Key processes: researching, investigating, interviewing, comparing, summarising] (ACLFWC048)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages Framework Y 7-10:</td>
<td>Consider and discuss their own and each other’s ways of communicating and expressing identity, reflecting on how the language links the local, regional and national identity of its speakers with the land [Key concepts: identity, perspective, biography; Key processes: sharing, comparing, considering, reflecting, analysing] (ACLFWC183)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People talk about Country, they are not just referring to ‘land’. Country also includes the oceans – **Sea Country**. All Country provides Aborigines with links to their past, as it holds the knowledge of the Ancestors; about Creation, sustainability, the relationship between all things, and the responsibility of caring for Country into the future.

Country is not just a commodity, or something to be exploited. Country is a living entity. Aboriginal people talk to Country, sing to Country, are sad when Country is sick and suffering, and have special ways of caring for Country.

Country also includes significant places. It may be where a particular resource is to be harvested or collected; where a particular ceremony is held; where important rituals are carried out. It may be a rock shelter, an ochre site, a stone quarry, or a shell bed.

“Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented, it is lived in and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun.

People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy.

Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like ‘spending a day in the country’ or ‘going up the country’. Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life.

Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart’s ease.”

Deborah Rose: Nourishing Terrains
Shell stringers (Makers) rely on Sea Country to provide the variety of shells that they collect for stringing. If the oceans are not healthy, then the marine life that the shellfish feed on is not healthy or abundant enough to sustain them, which in turn affects the shell population. Shell stringers know when and where to go to collect specific shells. They are aware about the relationships within the environment, and know what to look for – tides, weather and types of rocks and bays that are best suited for particular shells.

When the shell stringers are collecting and/or stringing shells, they often describe feeling connected – to the old women of generations past (Ancestral women), and to other shell stringers, particularly those who have taught them the intricacies of this very important cultural practice. Shell collecting and stringing is generally not an individual activity. Usually family groups go together, including children. It is where the young ones learn about the stories of the Ancestors, and the connections between the people and places. Specific places may hold special memories which are recounted time and again. Some shell stringers have their own ‘spots’ for collecting the precious marina (maireener) shells, and the location/s are a closely guarded secret. Particularly since the marina seem to be more scarce now. A number of the shell stringers mention this in their interviews.

Nourishing Terrains, Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness by Debra Rose is a wonderful resource to use regarding the connection between people and their Country.

Pre visit

Have students discuss/record:

• Whether they have a special place.
• What/where is it, and what makes it special. Do they feel connected to this place in a particular way? Is there a connection to key people – family members, friends etc.?
• The terms Country, Sea Country and place, and what is meant by those terms.
• The difference between Country and place.
• Watch the film Country Series: Coastal Places.

At the exhibition

Listen/look for special places as talked about by the shell stringers and make a list of those places.

Ask students to

• Watch the film projected on to the wall of the exhibition. Listen to the narration and words of the song. Make a note of key words/phrases, e.g. the name of the song liyini milaythina rrala (Singing Country Strong). (see Appendix 5 for the lyrics). Listen to the interviews with the shell stringers on the iPads located around the gallery and note the names of special places/Country.
Post visit

Discuss:

• The shell stringers’ special places – compare them with the students’ special places, and what makes them special.

• Caring for Country, in general, and in relation to shell collecting areas (Sea Country and marine environments).

• How can people use places and environments more sustainably?

• The consequences of changes to places and environments and how these changes can be managed.

• Why the Makers/stringers do not share the location/s of their special shell collecting places.

• The film in the exhibition shows beautiful footage of the Sea Country of lutruwita, with the song liyini milaythina rrala (Singing Country Strong) playing in the background. What does “singing Country strong” mean, and why would you ‘sing Country strong’? Watch the film Country Series: Inland Places, and think about/discuss the quotes that are spoken and how they relate to what the shell stringers say about Country, and the meaning of the words of the song. Also, have students discuss the explanation of ‘Country’ as provided by Deborah Rose (Nourishing Terrains p.7), that is at the beginning of this section of the guide.
Ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing

01.5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.

Australian Curriculum – Content descriptions

Languages framework Y 3-6: Recognise how kin relationships link people, place and story [Key concepts: kinship system, ways of talking, human relationships, interrelatedness; Key processes: recognising, interpreting, discussing]
(ACLFWU166)

Languages framework Y 3-6: Explore connections between identity and cultural values and beliefs and the expression of these connections in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages [Key concepts: Country/place, cultural expression and transmission, values, beliefs, spirituality; Key processes: observing, making connections, discussing, investigating]
(ACLFWU171)

Languages framework Y 7-10: Reflect on how ways of using language are shaped by communities’ ways of thinking, behaving and viewing the world, and the role of language in passing on knowledge [Key concepts: Indigenous knowledge, value transmission; Key processes: reflecting, exploring, analysing, comparing]
(ACLFWU193)

HASS Y 7: The influence of social connectedness and community identity on the liveability of places
(ACHASSK191)

Although the world of Aboriginal people has been severely impacted since invasion (see Appendix 3 for explanation), the way in which Aboriginal people view their world continues to be drawn from the old knowledge and ways, and underpins the relationships between all things. For example, Country is not ‘owned’ by Aborigines in the same way that some people might own their home, or property. Country is part of the people, and the people are part of Country.
The way in which Aboriginal people observe cultural protocols and practice their culture include processes or ‘doing’. Shell stringing is a process. There is a process by which one is expected to acquire the knowledge, and how that knowledge is put to use. There is a process of preparing the shells before they are strung. The process includes being able to understand the environment, and how it works in relation to the right time of the year (season) to collect the shells; where the shells are found; the right kind of tide; the kind of marine ecology that promotes a healthy ‘crop’ of shells.

Shell stringers talk about what they were/were not permitted to do, e.g. the younger children would accompany the Elder women to the beaches, but didn’t collect shells from the water until they were older and so on. They learnt by observing, then doing – working alongside the Elder women, listening to the conversations and stories. A shell stringer is required to learn the whole process – from collecting, cleaning, sorting and then stringing.

The Australian Curriculum Cross Curriculum Priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Organising Ideas are all interrelated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing are explored throughout this teacher guide. Aboriginal perspectives are not found in Aboriginal content, but in Aboriginal processes. 8 Ways of Learning is a useful pedagogy framework that assists educators to “include Aboriginal perspectives by using Aboriginal learning techniques; i.e. Tell a story. Make a plan. Think and do. Draw it. Take it outside. Try a new way. Watch first, then do. Share it with others.”

Pre visit

Suggested discussion points:
• Explore/discuss ‘tradition’.
• What is a ‘tradition’? What is men’s/women’s business?
• Has the process by which cultural knowledge is transmitted changed? What influences change (e.g. environmental change)?

At the exhibition
• Make a list of the shell stringing processes discussed throughout the exhibition.
• How has the knowledge been passed on (transmitted)?
• Have students make notes around any protocols they notice around collecting shells, i.e. collecting sustainably.

Post visit
• Compare the students’ lists made at the exhibition.
• Map out, using lists/drawings/images, the different steps in making a shell necklace.
• Are there any cultural protocols to be followed? List them. Why are they important?
• What are the responsibilities of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people with regard to the cultural protocols and processes around shell stringing?
• Have students discuss/write about something they have learned, who taught them, and how.
• Compare the processes, differences, similarities with how the information was transmitted.
Resilience and survival

Oi.6 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in Australia as first peoples of Country or Place and demonstrate resilience in responding to historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.

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<td>HASS Y 5: Examine different viewpoints on actions, events, issues and phenomena in the past and present (ACHASSI099)</td>
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<td>HASS Y 7: Identify a range of questions about the past to inform an historical inquiry (ACHHS207)</td>
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<td>HASS Y 8: Sequence historical events, developments and periods (ACHHS148)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HASS Y 9: The extension of settlement, including the effects of contact (intended and unintended) between European settlers in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACDSEH020)</td>
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Despite every aspect of their lives changing so completely from the time of invasion (see Appendix 3 for explanation) and subsequent colonisation, Tasmanian Aborigines have proven themselves to be strong and resilient. While Tasmanian Aborigines survived an ice age, they barely survived invasion.

In the face of dispossession and forced removal from Country, Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples’ adaptability and will to survive determined that, against the odds, all was not lost. While some aspects of culture were not remembered for a time, and some may never be remembered, some cultural practices have continued uninterrupted. For example palawa kani, the revived language of Tasmanian Aborigines, is going from strength to strength, since being initiated by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) in the early 1990s.

Shell stringing is one of a number of Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural practices that have continued across time. Aboriginal women who were taken to islands in the Bass Strait in the late 1700s and early 1800s not only ensured that the Aboriginal community survived, but that important cultural knowledge was maintained and sustained, so that future generations had access to that old knowledge.

Unfortunately for some Aboriginal families, the knowledge seemed lost, as there were no women in those families who carried on the tradition of shell stringing. In an attempt to see shell stringing reawakened in as many families as possible, the 2010 luna tunapri (Aboriginal women’s knowledge) project was developed. luna tunapri connected women of all ages from the three Tasmanian Aboriginal family groups with shell stringers (as educators and mentors), who passed on every aspect of this cultural practice to the participants. This led to the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String exhibition.

Each string of shells represents connection: connection to the Ancestors, Country, culture and to the old knowledge. Connection to the strong Aboriginal women who were determined that this cultural practice would continue, and connection to each other. Families – past, present and future.

“...these strands signify visitation and invasion, theft and trade, exile and co-existence, and especially, against the odds, Tasmanian Aboriginal survival…”

Julie Gough in the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String catalogue, TMAG 2016
Each string of shells also represents the resilience of a people, and the innovation to adapt to new ways of doing things. From piercing the shells using a tool made from animal bone, to using a needle, using cotton instead of animal sinew to thread the shells, introducing a variety of different shells, and new ways of cleaning them.

Pre visit
• Discuss how, and why things may have changed due to the impact of colonisation, for example:
  • access to resource collecting areas, such as shell beds, grasses for string, hunting grounds for sinew and animal bone;
  • removal from Country, and
  • disruption of family and kin structures.

Make notes using kanalaritja Past and Present (Appendix 4).

At the exhibition
Ask students to visit the interactive table in small groups during their visit. This table is set up to show the original shell stringing ‘toolkit’:
• Eye tooth of a kangaroo bone – what was this used for? What is used now?
• Animal sinew – what was it used for? What is used now?
• Can you think of any other materials that shells were strung on? (e.g. twine/string made from plant fibre)
• List materials used by the stringers across the three time periods:
  • Before 1803, 1803-1970s, 1970 – present. (Appendix 4, kanalaritja Past and Present)
• What has changed?
There is room to sit at the table, in the way that shell stringers sit around a table, stringing shells, telling yarns and having a laugh. Story telling is another very important part of being Aboriginal. It is a way of maintaining and passing on cultural knowledge. There are many ways of telling the stories of the past, such as song, dance, markings made in rock or on the walls of rock shelters and caves.

The iPads at the table provide an opportunity for visitors to experience making a ‘virtual’ necklace, using the shells that Aunty Lola Greeno has used in her Cape Barren Goose necklace and bracelet.

The Cape Barren Goose shell bracelet is a ‘story’ bracelet. Aunty Lola Greeno has used different shells (see p.13 Education Kit, Cultural Jewels, Object Australian Design Centre) to depict elements of the Cape Barren Goose, a bird that is special to her. The grey gull shells are the feathers on the body, black crow shells are the feet, oat shells are the legs, penguin shells are the beak and cockle shells are the white under the wings.

Activity:
Students can take turns creating a pattern on the iPads provided. Working in pairs, one student can record the pattern sequence of their partner.

Post visit

Research/compare:
- Compare the pre-visit and exhibition lists. Are there any additions to the pre-visit list?
- Compare and compile a list of pattern sequences. How many different sequences have been recorded? Are there any more possible combinations?
- Ask students to write about how they felt when they saw their necklace come to ‘virtual’ life.
- Compare/add to pre-visit discussion notes regarding Past and Present methods.

Activity:
This activity was developed by teachers at Lansdowne Crescent Primary School, Tasmania.
- Have students chose a native animal that they will represent in a similar way to Aunty Lola, using shells (see shell identifier p 10 Education Kit, Cultural Jewels, Object Australian Design Centre) or other materials.

Students can record:
- why they chose the animal
- the shells chosen
- which part of the animal each shell represents
- the pattern sequence
- how many sequences of the pattern did it take to complete the ‘necklace’.

Interesting fact:
Verna Nichols has made a necklace of marina shells that is over 3.5 metres in length, with 1582 shells! Check out Verna’s interview in the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String documentary film.

How long would it take to string over 1000 shells?
Family and kinship

O1.8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ family and kinship structures are strong and sophisticated.

Australian Curriculum – Content descriptions

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Describe kinship relations as a system and explain its role in determining social behaviour [Key concepts: identity, relationship, kinship, family terms, social groupings/sub-groupings, story, behaviour, ways of talking, key processes: investigating, explaining, describing, categorising]

(ACLFWC032)

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Recognise how kin relationships link people, Place and story [Key concepts: kinship system, ways of talking, human relationships, interrelatedness, Key processes: recognising, interpreting, discussing]

(ACLFWU166)

**Languages framework Y 3-6:** Explore their own sense of identity, including elements such as family, friends, interests, membership of groups, and consider markers of identity that may be important across all cultures [Key concepts: identity (individual and group), kinship, community, membership; Key processes: creating, representing, discussing, comparing]

(ACLFWC161)

**Languages framework Y 7-10:** Investigate how the kinship system functions to integrate personal and community histories and relationships [Key concepts: interconnectedness, human relationships, ownership, rights and responsibilities; Key processes: describing, explaining, investigating, exploring]

(ACLFWU188)

All aspects of Aboriginal life have been, and continue to be impacted on as a result of invasion and subsequent colonisation, including family and kinship structures.

Connections to Country, culture and particularly to family underpin all aspects of the exhibition.

The way in which the necklaces and information are presented is testament to how Aboriginal people approach ‘learning’, and the importance that families have played in the maintenance of shell stringing.

Although Tasmanian Aboriginal kinship structure is not the same as it was before 1803, Tasmanian Aborigines have maintained and sustained their family connections, and those family connections continue to be strong. The knowledge of the Ancestors, who they are and the transmission of cultural knowledge through families continue to be important aspects of community life.

“...spending time with those old girls...it’s really special having that one-on-one time with them each but also collectively. It connects us with the past and all those people that have gone before us. So it connects me with my old aunties and my grandmothers and my great grandmothers...and that string is unbroken as well...”

Tanya Harper in the kanalaritja: An Unbroken String documentary film
Pre visit

Discussion points:

- What do students consider represents ‘family’ in their context, e.g. special connection with someone, or somewhere? How do they feel when they think about that person/place?
- Has the notion of ‘family’ changed, and how? For example, gender roles, single parent families.

At the exhibition

- The shell stringers represent different family groups within the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Make a list of the families represented.

Post visit

- Have students create a Word Cloud with words describing their special place and/or person. Write a poem using those words.
- Have students bring in, or describe, an object that is special to them or a loved one, e.g. a family heirloom or bible. Focus on how it connects them to past family members and why these connections are important.
- Shell stringing has been maintained by a number of families. Ask students to discuss any ’traditions’ that have been passed down in their families ie: recipes, knowledge, skills, going to the same place for holidays.
The significant contributions of Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the present and past are acknowledged locally, nationally and globally.

Australian Curriculum – Content descriptions

| HASS Y 5 & 6: | Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges (ACHASSI094) (ACHASSI122) |
| HASS Y 6: | The contribution of individuals and groups to the development of Australian society since Federation (ACHASSK137) |
| HASS Y 6: | Sequence information about people’s lives, events, developments and phenomena using a variety of methods including timelines (ACHASSI125) |

The strong Ancestral women who maintained the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, and their culture, have contributed significantly to the ongoing health and well-being of today’s community. The families who refused to allow those aspects of culture to be lost forever have also paved the way for future generations, including the women who have guarded and sustained the age-old knowledge and practice of shell stringing. In fact, their contribution to cultural maintenance is immeasurable.

Many of the Elder shell stringers have been recognized locally, nationally and internationally, with their creations held in galleries, museums and other institutions.

A National Living Treasure
Shell stringer Aunty Lola Greeno has been recognized by Object: Australian Design Centre as the 2014 Australian Living Treasure.

Pre-visit
- Watch the film Lola Greeno – My Story
- What do think that means for Aunty Lola and her family? What does it mean for the shell stringers/Makers? What does it mean for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community?

At the exhibition
- Have students research Aunty Lola’s life using information from the kanalaritja exhibition. Students can use the iPads placed throughout the exhibition and at the interactive table to listen to her interview.

Post-visit
- Have students write a profile of Aunty Lola.
- Identify the shell stringers in the exhibition who have works in
  - other galleries/museums in Tasmania
  - in Australia
  - international galleries/museums
Curating an exhibition
The following section relates specifically to curating an exhibition.

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<tr>
<td><strong>HASS Y 5</strong>: Develop appropriate questions to guide an inquiry about people, events, developments, places, systems and challenges (ACHASSI094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Arts Y 5-6</strong>: Plan the display of artworks to enhance their meaning for an audience (ACAVAM116)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages framework Y 7-10</strong>: Consider and discuss their own and each other’s ways of communicating and expressing identity, reflecting on how the language links the local, regional and national identity of its speakers with the land [Key concepts: identity, perspective, biography; Key processes: sharing, comparing, considering, reflecting, analysing] (ACLFWC183)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts Y 7-8</strong>: Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Arts Y 9-10</strong>: Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-visit

• Individually or in pairs/small groups, have students choose one of the shell stringers that they will research, and focus on at the exhibition, with the view to reporting back to the class in writing. Document as much information as possible about the shell stringer of your choice.

• Find out the meaning of ‘provenance’.

• Discuss the importance of provenance, particularly with regard to the collections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural material.

At the exhibition

Have students note:

• how the necklaces and exhibitors are displayed (i.e. very old necklaces together, family members, new makers);

• what family groups are represented in the exhibition;

• the common ‘threads’ throughout the exhibition;

• the oldest necklace in the exhibition;

• the most senior shell stringer represented in the exhibition; and

• the youngest shell stringer in the exhibition.

Note innovative design features of the exhibition display cases, such as:

• why the cases are on wheels;

• the ‘busts’ on which the necklaces are displayed; and

• how information is displayed on the cases.

Post visit

Using the techniques described in Interviewing an Aboriginal Community Member Learning Task developed by Aboriginal Education Services, Tasmania. Department of Education:

• Ask students to write 3 questions that they could ask a shell stringer of the very old necklaces, if she were living.

• Invite an Aboriginal community member or shell stringer to visit your class. In Tasmania, Aboriginal Education Services may be able to assist you. (For other places in Australia and the Torres Strait, look up your local Indigenous Education website for details.)

• Have students interview a teacher or other student at the school.

• Have students discuss how and why the necklaces are grouped in each case.

Artworks/exhibition objects are displayed in ways that speak to the theme of the exhibition/display, and to relay to visitors the message depicted by the artist and his/her work.

The kanalaritja exhibition is about Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, specifically shell stringing. However the necklaces are displayed as works of art.

Discuss:

• What is an ‘artwork’?

• What is a ‘cultural object’?

• How do you place a monetary value on something that is priceless in terms of a living cultural practice, i.e. the necklaces are cultural mementos and representations of identity, resilience and survival. How do you measure that in money?
Further post visit activities

Have students reflect on the exhibition, thinking about what they thought they knew before their visit.

Using notes on the kanalaritja KWL chart ([Appendix 1](#)) have students reflect:

- Were their observations about what they knew correct?
- What did they learn that was new to them?
- What would they like to learn more about, and why?
- Have students write a review about the exhibition. Links to actual reviews can be found in the Resources section.
- Consider what the purpose of the exhibition is, and whether it was achieved. How was it achieved?
- Have students interview a curator.
- Ask students: if you were a curator, what things would you need to consider when developing the exhibition?
- Have the class develop a display/mini exhibition.

Students can discuss: cultural objects or objets d’art?

- Shell stringers, continuing an age old cultural practice/tradition, are not just ‘cultural practitioners’ but artists, and some are very well known and their work is highly prized and sought after.
- The ‘art objects’ are also cultural objects – necklaces of shells, kelp water carriers, canoes, waddies etc.
- Originally each object had a purpose, but are now (often) for display only.
- They were meant to be used, to be handled, but are now locked away in the dark in drawers and boxes or on display behind glass or Perspex.
- How do you place a value on these cultural objects as works of art, a symbol of survival, identity, strength and resilience?

**Intellectual Property (IP)**

Whose information is it, and who has the right to:

- Access and/or use Aboriginal community information/knowledge to profit from that knowledge?
- Benefit from knowledge as a result of research?
- Patent knowledge/use of cultural resources – e.g. natural therapies/medical research?
- Are there any laws that protect Aboriginal communities from misappropriation of their cultural knowledge/information? See [Respecting Cultures: Working with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community and Aboriginal Artists](#) for more information.
Classification of shells

Australian Curriculum – Content descriptions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Science Y 5:</th>
<th>Living things have structural features and adaptations that help them to survive in their environment (ACSSU043)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science Y 6:</td>
<td>Scientific knowledge is used to solve problems and inform personal and community decisions (ACSHE100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science Y 7:</td>
<td>Classification helps organise the diverse group of organisms (ACSSU111)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science Y 8:</td>
<td>Science knowledge can develop through collaboration across the disciplines of science and the contributions of people from a range of cultures (ACSHE226)</td>
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Research

- What are gastropods and bivalves, and where would you find them?

Draw some examples, naming the features of the shells.

- Using a diagram, name the different tidal zones, and identify in which tidal zone shells used by stringers would be found.

- There are many uses for shells. Have the class brainstorm as many uses for shells as possible.

- The shells are known by a number of different names. For each shell, list the common name/s, the scientific name and the name used by the shell stringers.

Some discussion points:
The *kanalaritja*: An Unbroken String exhibition includes a necklace of echidna quills.

- Brainstorm how students think the *echidna quills* are collected.

- Are there any restrictions on who can collect the shells, echidna quills, other materials (e.g. kelp)? Information is available on the [Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service website](#).

- List any restrictions (i.e. legal restrictions) to collecting materials for shell stringing, and discuss why these restrictions might be in place. [Schedule 5](#) provides a list of fish that Tasmanian Aboriginal people can collect/catch under the [Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995](#).

- Research other Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who make shell necklaces.

Find out the types of shells, how they are strung and what they are strung on.

- Research Indigenous cultures in other parts of the world that string shells and/or make necklaces.

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Nanette Shaw (b.1953). Blue gulls, M8938a
Bronwyn McAnally (b.1982). Black crow and penguin shells.
Purchased TMAG Foundation, 2016
Conclusion

The Australian Curriculum provides many more opportunities for education for all learners to further develop their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures. This guide provides examples of lines of inquiry specific to the topic of Tasmanian Aboriginal shell stringing and the exhibition *kanalaritja*. An Unbroken String, and also extends beyond to different discussion topics that are all interrelated.

This exhibition is a unique and special way to further enhance students’ understanding of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture. By engaging with the exhibition and associated materials, such as the website and catalogue, students can also engage with the oldest living culture in the world.

Further resources

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery *kanalaritja* resources

*kanalaritja*: An Unbroken String documentary film

Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Library

**Useful resources relating to Country and place:**

Connection to Country

Meeting with the Land Learning Task

Culturally Responsive Practice: Country and Community

Culturally Responsive Practice: Connecting with Place

Nourishing Terrains, Deborah Rose, Australian Heritage Commission

Country Series: Inland Places: Tasmanian Aboriginal Education

Country Series: Coastal Places: Tasmanian Aboriginal Education

**Biographies:**

Art Link Pathways to art in Aboriginal Tasmania: Lola Greeno

Department of Premier and Cabinet: Lola Greeno

Aboriginal Art Directory: Lola Greeno – National Living Treasure

Object: Australian Design Centre: Education Kit Cultural Jewels; Lola Greeno

Tasmanian Times: Joan Brown

Tasmanian Times: Aunty Dulcie Greeno

Design and Art Australia Online: Corrie Fullard

Design and Art Australia Online: Jeanette James

**Articles and reviews:**

ABC: Unbroken String, ancient art of shell necklaces links generations of Aboriginal Tasmanians

Artlink

TasWeekend: A shore thing

Review by Andrew Harper for TasWeekend magazine, Mercury Newspaper (Appendix 6)

**Education websites:**

Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation

Aboriginal Education Services Tasmania
# Appendices

## Appendix 1

*kanalaritja: An Unbroken String Exhibition – KWL*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT I KNOW</th>
<th>WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW</th>
<th>WHAT I HAVE LEARNED</th>
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Appendix 2

This map represents the nine Tasmanian Aboriginal Language Groups

Important areas to Aboriginal people prior to colonisation

Image courtesy:
Aboriginal Education Services
Department of Education Tasmania
Appendix 3

Invasion

With the coming of Europeans to this continent now known as ‘Australia’, and the establishment of convict outposts and settlements, there has not been one aspect of Aboriginal life that has not been severely impacted on. In fact many of the 300 + original nations of this continent no longer exist as a result of murder, massacre, introduced diseases and the appropriation and occupation of traditional lands. Words including ‘discovery’, ‘occupation’ and ‘settlement’ are some of the words that are used to describe these events.

Aboriginal people, however, often use the word ‘invasion’ (e.g. instead of January 26th being referred to as ‘Australia Day’, many Aboriginal people call it ‘Invasion Day’).

It is perhaps understandable, if we look at some dictionary definitions of ‘invasion’, i.e. ‘take possession [of]’, ‘to intrude upon’, ‘to overrun’.

Invasion Day Rally, Parliament House Lawns, Hobart 2014 Image: Theresa Sainty
## Appendix 4

**kanalaritja: Past and Present**

### TYPES OF MATERIALS USED

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Before 1803</th>
<th>1803-1970</th>
<th>1970-present</th>
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### METHODS/PROCESSES

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<th>1803-1970</th>
<th>1970-present</th>
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### COLLECTING OF RESOURCES

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<th>1803-1970</th>
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23
Appendix 5

liyini milaythina rrala
Singing Country Strong

Verse 1
lutruwita is the Country of our Ancestors
travelled a long way a long time
Dancing many fires x 2
Songs are within the land
Singing Country strong

Verse 2
Babies born to mothers
Fathers hunting wallaby
Rivers’ waters flowing - flowing to the sea
Strength of our grandmothers
Growing families strong

Chorus (English)
We stand strong for our Country
We are the people of lutruwita
From larapuna to kunanyi
This is our land x 2

Chorus (palawa kani)
takamuna rrala putalina-ta
waranta pakana lutruwita
tapilti larapuna kunanyi
milaythina-mana-mapali

takamuna rrala takayna-ta
waranta pakana lutruwita
tapilti larapuna kunanyi
milaythina-mana-mapali

Chorus 3 (English translation)
(We) stand strong at putalina
We are the people of lutruwita
From larapuna to kunanyi
This is our land
We stand strong at takayna
We are the people of lutruwita
From larapuna to kunanyi

Bridge
putalina is our land
larapuna is our land
takayna is our land
milaythina mana mapali x 2

Chorus (palawa kani)
takamuna rrala putalina-ta
waranta pakana lutruwita
tapilti larapuna kunanyi
milaythina-mana-mapali
takamuna rrala takayna-ta
waranta pakana lutruwita
tapilti larapuna kunanyi
milaythina-mana-mapali

Verse 3
Dancing many fires
Dancing many fires
Songs are within the land
Singing country strong
Rivers’ waters flowing
Flowing to the sea
Strength of our grandmothers
Singing country strong x 2

Lyrics: Theresa Sainty; Music: Jodi Haines; First performed by Tasmanian Aboriginal Community singing group and guest artists Lorrae Coffin & Matthew Fargher at putalina Festival 17 January 2015
Coming out of their shell

kanalaritja: An Unbroken String
TMAG
Dunn place
Until Sunday, May 21

A subtle strand of questioning spins out laterally from this marvellous exhibition. There’s a gentle but strong statement beneath it all. Perhaps it goes something like this: “We know who we are. We have been through much and we have had so much taken away from us. We have been treated appallingly, and in the end, it served to make us stronger in understanding who we are, our identity. We know who we are. Now, who are you?”

To which I have no answer. There barely is one. There is fierce political debate around the creation and maintenance of culture in Australia and the very ugliest aspects of racially based identity politics are rearing up. Strong statements about identity and culture tend to be made during challenging times.

That is what makes An Unbroken String feel so contemporary. The exhibition makes many interesting points, but for me the strongest is that the making of beautiful shell necklaces is ongoing. The activity has changed and adapted but it has not ended. Once one grasps that this cultural activity has remained constant even in the face of colonialism, the reality of how important this is sinks in. The unbroken chain of the necklaces tells a story. One sees them as the end results of a series of physical actions: the gathering of the correct shells (and there are many in each necklace), the polishing of them so that the tiny rainbow spectrums each contains are coaxed into the light, and the repetitive nature of stringing shells, all done by Tasmanian Aboriginal women.

The exhibition is presented extraordinarily well and takes considerable care in creating a context for the work, along with showing and honouring the women who undertake the activity. The accompanying video enriches the makers’ stories and underlines again that this is a living cultural activity.

This is a humbling exhibition. The women who make these necklaces are preserving and judiciously sharing something of great importance, and they do so with obvious calmness. They know who they are. Along with this, though, is the sharing this exhibition implies: the makers are actively showing their resilient culture, unique to this place and land.

The necklaces glow with more than just light.