



Aboriginal Time - Teacher's Notes

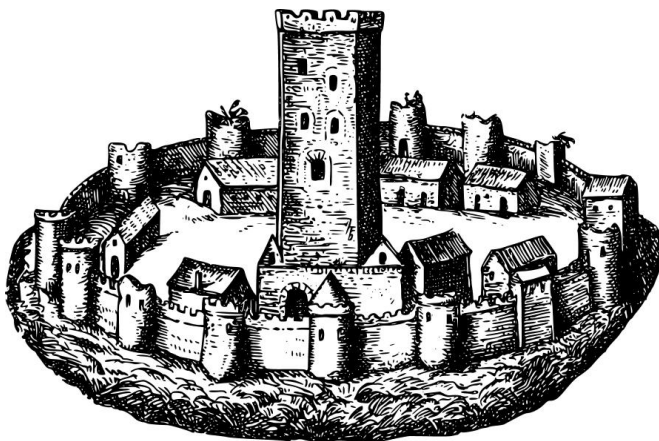
Aboriginal Time

How people in the past divided up the day depended on their lifestyle.



Nomadic people followed food sources and their day did not have regular intervals as they had to respond immediately to any opportunities and challenges provided by Nature.

Agrarian communities were more settled but still had need only of general divisions or information from bells or singing the call to the faithful from the minaret, if nearby. Looking after domestic animals and planting crops provided their own times and calendar.



hours. "10 o'clock and all is well".

City people had greater need for organised time as trade depends on people being in the same place at the same time. People needed to be organized. Towns would have bells that rang out the times of religious services; town criers called out the daytime hours and night watchmen called out night



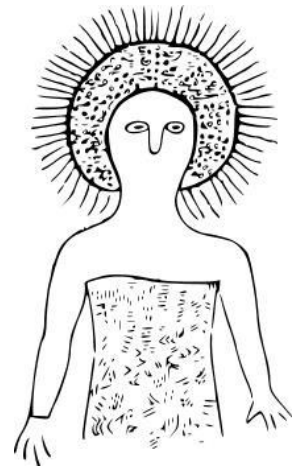
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In the not too distant past, after about 70,000 years ago our ancestors lived in sub-Saharan Africa. As the Ice Age finished they moved north to populate the rest of the World.

One group moved quickly and arrived here in Australia about 50,000 years ago to be followed by two later waves before sea level rose and cut off the continent. These were the ancestors of all present Aboriginal Australians. It is said they lived in the Dreamtime.

Aboriginal people had to keep moving so that they did not exhaust local food and water supplies. They lived a sustainable existence. They travelled in small family groups of perhaps five adults and six children and followed a "Hunter Gatherer" lifestyle. The men hunted large game such as kangaroo and emu whilst the women hunted small game such as lizards, gathered seeds and fruit and looked after the children. They wore simple skin clothes and carried only a few tools. They didn't "wander about" but cleverly followed routes they knew would bring them seasonal food and water. These routes (Song lines) were described in songs and stories, which they passed on to their children. They had no permanent settlements or written language. Until recently Aboriginal people in Australia followed such an apparently simple but actually very efficient lifestyle. It was the only way to survive in such a vast resource-poor land as ours.

The Aboriginal dreamtime starts with dark night. The spirits put fire in the sky to warm the first men and women but it was a weak fire and they didn't feel much heat. Then fire is cunningly stolen to bring daylight to Earth. A story from Melville Island tells how the first man Purnukapali lit the first torch from this fire and his sister, Wurupranala, who later became the sun, carried it during the day.

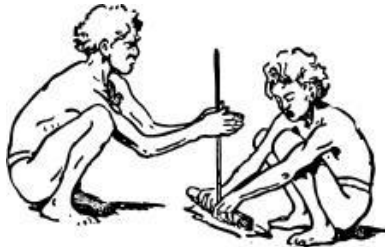


A wanjina or ancestor spirit





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Words common to most Aboriginal languages suggests that 24 hours could be broken into:

Pre dawn	Daybreak	Morning	Midday
Daytime	Late afternoon	Just before sunset	Sunset
Middle of the night		Nighttime	

Since they did not carry clocks, how did people know when it is daybreak?

The sun "rises" over the horizon.

How did they know when it is midday? The sun was at its highest or directly overhead. Their shadow stopped growing smaller and pointed in the opposite direction.

How did they know it was sunset? The sun appeared to go down over the horizon.

Some groups could mark the passing of time at night by the movement of constellations through the sky.

Why do you think that early Aboriginal people did not need to break the day into smaller fractions such as hours and minutes? They travelled in small groups and rarely met up with others. They did not need to tell the time as they reacted to whatever their travels and Nature brought them.

At what time of day would an early Aboriginal person go hunting game?

Anytime they were hungry and wanted meat.

At what time would an Aboriginal family eat roast kangaroo? Anytime after it had been caught and cooked.

At what time of day would an Aboriginal family next eat roast kangaroo?

Anytime after the first kangaroo had been eaten and the next kangaroo had been caught and cooked.

