

# Aboriginal Australians

Aboriginal Australians could be the oldest population of humans living outside of Africa, where one theory says they migrated from in boats 70,000 years ago.



This is the Australian Aboriginal Flag, adopted in 1972. The red symbolises the red earth and ochre used by Aboriginal peoples in ceremonies. The yellow symbolises the sun and the black symbolises the Aboriginal peoples.

Australia's first people—known as Aboriginal Australians—have lived on the continent for over 50,000 years. Today, there are 250 distinct language groups spread throughout Australia. Aboriginal Australians are split into two groups: Aboriginal peoples, who are related to those who already inhabited Australia when Britain began colonizing the island in 1788, and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who descend from residents of the Torres Strait Islands, a group of islands that is part of modern-day Queensland, Australia.

All Aboriginal Australians are related to groups

indigenous to Australia. However, the use of the term indigenous is controversial, since it can be claimed by people who descend from people who weren't the original inhabitants of the island. Legally, "Aboriginal Australian" is recognized as "a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he [or she] lives."



This is the Torres Strait Islander flag adopted in 1992. The green panels represent the land, the blue symbolises the waters of the Torres Strait, the white object in the middle is a dancer's headdress (called a dhari) and symbolises the Torres Strait Islander peoples. The star is a symbol for navigation.

## Aboriginal origins

In 2017, a genetic study of the genomes of 111 Aboriginal Australians found that today's Aboriginal Australians are all related to a common ancestor who was a member of a distinct population that emerged on the mainland about 50,000 years ago. Humans are thought to have migrated to Northern Australia from Asia using

primitive boats. A current theory holds that those early migrants themselves came out of Africa about 70,000 years ago, which would make Aboriginal Australians the oldest population of humans living outside Africa



## British settlement

When British settlers began colonizing Australia in 1788, between 750,000 and 1.25 Aboriginal Australians are estimated to have lived there. Soon, epidemics ravaged the island's indigenous people, and British settlers seized Aboriginal lands.

Though some Aboriginal Australians did resist—up to 20,000 indigenous people died in violent conflict on the colony's frontiers—most were subjugated by massacres and the impoverishment of their communities as British settlers seized their lands.

## "The Dreamtime"

Aboriginal spirituality entails a close relationship between humans and the land. Aborigines call the beginning of the world the "Dreaming," or "Dreamtime." In the "Dreamtime," aboriginal "Ancestors" rose from below the earth to form various parts of nature including animal species, bodies of water, and the sky.

Unlike other religions, however, aboriginal belief does not place the human species apart from or on a higher level than nature. Aborigines believe some of the Ancestors metamorphosed into nature (as in rock formations or rivers), where they remain spiritually alive.

## Storytelling, Art, and the Didgeridoo



The oral tradition of storytelling informs aborigines' vibrant cultural life. Songs illustrate the Dreamtime and other tales of the land, while dances and diagrams drawn in the sand accompany oral tales.

In the Northern Territory, aboriginal art includes sculpture, bark and rock paintings, and baskets and beadwork. Rock carvings and

paintings can be found in such places as Arnhem Land, Ubirr, and Nourlangie. Many aborigines earn a living through selling native artworks.

Aboriginal music is often recognizable for its most famous instrument, the didgeridoo. A wind instrument typically made from bamboo, it extends about five feet and produces a low, vibrating hum. Aborigines use didgeridoos in formal ceremonies at such events as sunsets, circumcisions, and funerals.

## The Stolen Generations

Between 1910 and 1970, government policies of assimilation led to between 10 and 33 percent of Aboriginal Australian children being forcibly removed from their homes. These “Stolen Generations” were put in adoptive families and institutions and forbidden from speaking their native languages. Their names were often changed.

In 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued a national apology for the country’s actions toward Aboriginal Australians of the Stolen Generations; since then, Australia has worked to reduce social disparities between Aboriginal Australians and non-indigenous Australians.

Only in 1967 did Australians vote that federal laws also would apply to Aboriginal Australians. Most Aboriginal Australians did not have full citizenship or voting rights until 1965.

## The struggle continues

Today, about three percent of Australia’s population has Aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal Australians still struggle to retain their ancient culture and fight for recognition—and restitution—from the Australian government. The state of Victoria is currently working toward a first-of-its-kind treaty with its Aboriginal population that would recognize Aboriginal Australians’ sovereignty and include compensation. However, Australia itself has never made such a treaty, making it the only country in the British Commonwealth not to have ratified a treaty with its First Nations peoples.

### Complete these sentences according to the text

1. There are two groups of Aboriginal Australians:

2. The colours in the Australian Aboriginal flag represent

3. The colours in the Torres Strait Aboriginal flag symbolize

4. There are two theories that explain how Aboriginal Australians arrived in the continent:

5. As a result of colonization

6. The Dreamtime is an Aboriginal belief in which

7. Aboriginal cultural life includes

8. Aboriginal art is represented

9. The digeridoo

10. Aborigines play it

11. The Stolen Generations were

12 They were placed

13 They were not allowed

14 In 2008

15 In 1965 Aboriginal Australians were granted

16 Nowadays Aboriginal Australians

