

Stage 1 - Aboriginal Studies

Australia Wide Perspectives

1a. How many Aboriginal groups are believed to have occupied Australia prior to 1788?

601 - Refer to Appendix 1 for more details

b. How many different groups occupied the area now known as South Australia?

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c. Name the major cultural groups in South Australia.

Refer to Appendix 2 for names and position of each cultural group within the state.

2. In what way/s would the lifestyle of a group living in the Western Desert cultural region be

(Refer to Appendix 3 for a map indicating these two regions)

(a) different to and

The defining feature of the Riverina was the Murray river as the name suggests. Lack of water was never a problem; in fact often there was too much¹. As a result there was a wide variety of plant and animal life on the land and in the water. Because of the abundant supply of food and water clan groupings sometimes remained in the same spot for up to six months. The Riverina region was possibly the most densely populated area in Australia with an estimated figure of one person every kilometre.

In contrast the Western Desert Region was dry and water was scarce for there was no permanent streams available². The harsh environment resulted in limited food resources. Cultural groups needed to be mobile and travel light to take advantage of the changing opportunities to gather food and water throughout the region. The arid Western Desert conditions significantly contributed to the population being as little as one person per 200 kilometres.

(b) the same as a group living in the Riverina cultural region?

The lifestyle of both cultural groups evolved around their Dreaming faith. Their art, ceremonies, social structures, hunting and food gathering was learn't and practiced from Dreaming knowledge and spiritualism. As a result their life was structured according to their contrasting environment and not according to some abstract general rule as often is the case in European society.

They respected the territories of other cultural groups within their region. The life of every Aboriginal cultural group throughout Australia is communal, not every man for himself as is the western way.

¹ S.J. Hemming and P.A. Clarke, 'Murray and South-East culture region', *Aboriginal Australia, Aboriginal People of South Australia*, 1991, pg. 12

² *ibid.*, p. 3

Both groups lived off the land and didn't gather any more than they needed. Emu's, kangaroo's and smaller game were hunted by both groups, likewise the collection of roots and grubs.

3a) What do Aboriginal people have a close relationship to?

Aboriginal's are very family orientated, they think about their brothers and sisters and most importantly their 'Mother' the land. Hunting, singing, dancing and the whole of their life are not some isolated abstract things that they do; they are all a part of their overall dream and purpose to remain united with each other and the bigger part of themselves - the land. Their interwoven relationships are with the earth and everything natural. They lived in harmony with their land and sought to keep in constant union with their ever present Dreaming.

b) How do Aboriginal people see themselves in relation to their land?

They are a part of the land and the land is a part of them. They respect the land because they don't just see it as a physical thing but something sacred and spiritually connected to themselves. They have the understanding that all of life is interrelated and that if you ruin the land and the environment you will ultimately ruin yourself.

c) What obligations do Aboriginal people have to the land?

First and foremost they have an obligation to care for the land, since they acknowledge that the land cares for them. The life they lived was a perfect model of conservation, unlike much of our own lives which are pretty good models of consumption.

4a) Explain the importance of the Dreaming to Aboriginal people

Dreaming means everything to Aboriginal people because the whole of their life is interrelated with dreaming philosophy and practice. Their very identity and deeper reasons for living all relate to the Dreaming. It contains creation stories and tells of the ancient work of ancestral spirit beings. The Aboriginal faith gives them ethical and social values as a standard to guide their communal interactions.

Each cultural group has a unique connection to a particular facet of the land that they are obligated to care for and count as a part of themselves. Likewise each individual as a unique link with the particular spot where their mother first became aware of her pregnancy¹.

b) What do Dreaming stories provide children with?

Dreaming provides children with the knowledge to live with the land. Dreaming stories relate the laws of the land, the cultural ethics of the Aboriginal community and the overall wholistic philosophy and principles of living as one with the environment. This knowledge is not only handed down orally but also through their art. Symbols, designs and colours all represent information which holds meaning and significance to their way of life. Ritual, ceremonies and dance all tell a story and give lessons in life.

¹ Education Department of South Australia, *The Kurna People, Aboriginal People of the Adelaide Plains*, South Australia, 1989, pg.28

5) **What was the purpose of seasonal trails?**

The purpose of seasonal trails was to get full use of the land and its environment. The necessity of food and water required Aboriginal cultural groups to move according to available supplies. The availability of food was influenced according to changing seasons and moving location in accordance with the seasons.

Seasonal food trails were also a way of preserving the land and its surrounding environment. By moving to a different location they would allow the land, vegetation and wildlife to replenish and recover from human interference. Seasonal food trails were a way of keeping in balance with the natural ecosystems rather than straining the life out of them, as is the practice of so called 'developed' cultures.

Seasonal trails also fulfilled another purpose – living in dreamtime. Sensitivity to the Dreaming is being sensitive to the time to leave one area of the land to move to another. Seasonal trails fulfil the movement required to remain in the Dreaming. An Aboriginal must remain open to the guidance of the spirit and then be ready to move when prompted.

6) **Traditional Aboriginal people lived as hunter/gatherers. What does this mean?**

The term hunter/gatherers is used for a people who solely provide for themselves. They actually hunt and gather their own food when they need it. They are totally and completely self sufficient and have no need to depend on others for food like ourselves. As a people from a capitalist nation, we find it very difficult to survive when the food supplies that we depend on are diminished. We don't possess the knowledge or skill to live off the land as traditional hunter/gatherers.

Bibliography

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