

WIRADJURI CULTURE IN GUNDAGAI



Opal Kothe-Champion, Rylee Byrne,
Jessica Crooks and Destiny Cooper

Gundagai South Public School



Creative Catchment Kids

Creative Catchment Kids is an initiative of Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre. It aims to improve engagement between our funding partners and school students by providing opportunities for positive and authentic ventures that encourage students to develop creative solutions to agriculture and natural resource management issues.

www.wirraminna.org/creative-catchment-kids/

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre

The Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre is located in Burrumbuttock, north of Albury in southern NSW. Since 1995, the centre, which is adjacent to Burrumbuttock Public School, has provided opportunities for discovery and learning about the natural environment, the ecology of the local woodlands and the beauty of native plants.

www.wirraminna.org

Enviro-Stories

Enviro-Stories is an innovative literacy education program that inspires learning about natural resource and catchment management issues. Developed by PeeKdesigns, this program provides students with an opportunity to publish their own stories that have been written for other kids to support learning about their local area.

www.envirostories.com.au

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Our Culture

In 2016, students involved in the Creative Catchment Kids program researched and wrote stories about Aboriginal culture in their local communities. The program was generously funded by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and Riverina Local Land Services.

Creative Catchment Kids is part of Enviro-Stories, a Peekdesigns education program.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land and thank them for sharing their knowledge and culture with us.

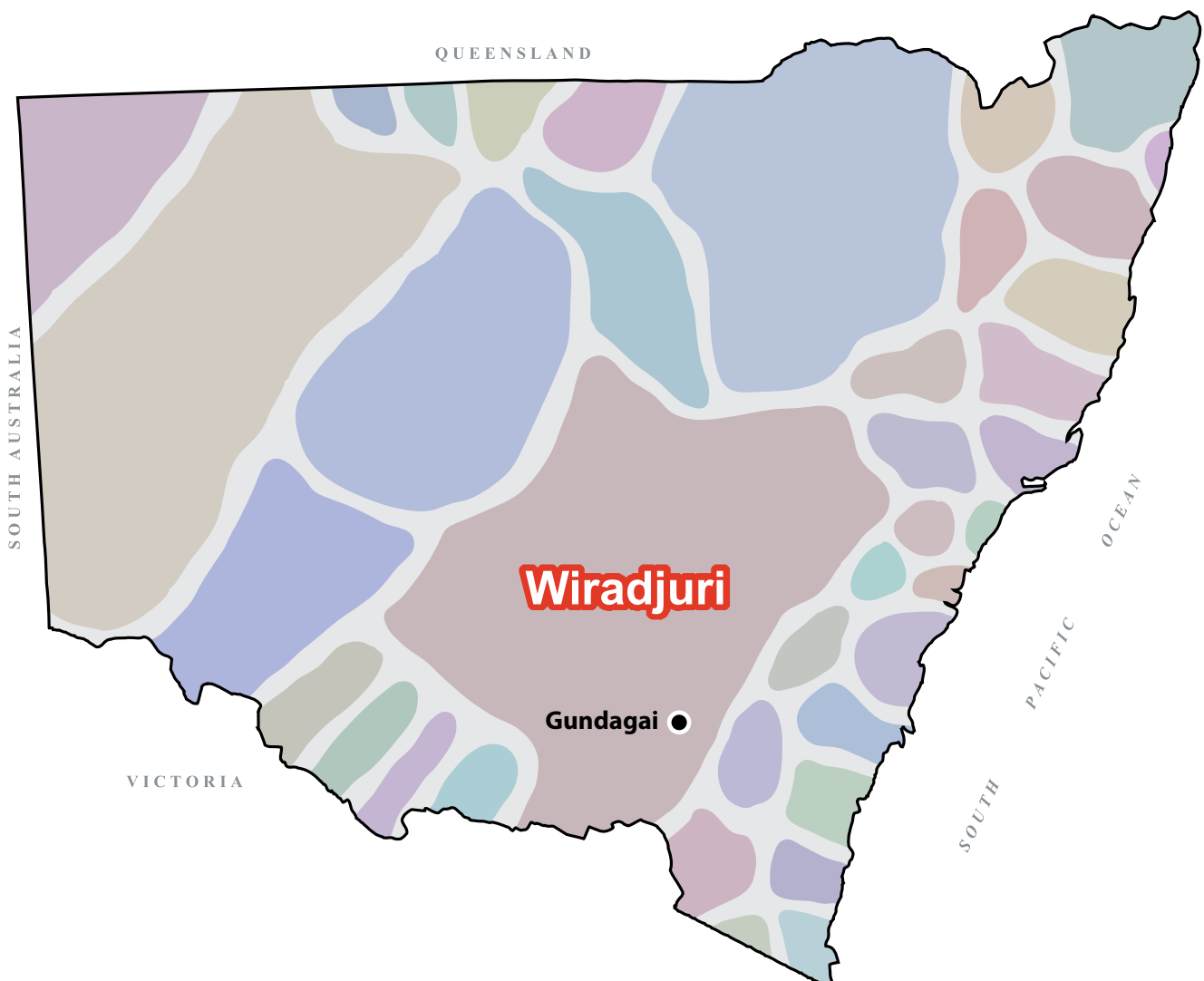
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document may contain images and/or names of people who have since passed away.



Gundagai is a small country town located between Wagga Wagga and Canberra in the Riverina region of New South Wales.

The original Aboriginal inhabitants of the Gundagai region were from the Wiradjuri nation. The Wiradjuri nation is the largest Aboriginal nation in New South Wales and one of the largest Aboriginal nations in Australia.

The Wiradjuri nation has its own language, customs laws and culture. Many people are working to keep the Wiradjuri language and culture alive today. We were very fortunate to meet Aunty Phyllis Freeman from Brungle and Shane Herrington and Talea Bulger from Brungle and Tumut who shared their knowledge and passion with us to help us write this book about traditional Wiradjuri culture and land use in the Gundagai area





Box-Gum Grassy Woodland (above) and a traditional-style gunyah (below)

Traditionally, Aboriginal people lived off the land. The Wiradjuri people of Gundagai and Brungle lived in harmony with plants, animals, land and the water. They believed they didn't own the land but they were responsible for looking after it.

They were mindful of the seasons and knew when different plants and animals were available at different times of the year. When hunting plants and animals, they took only what they needed to make sure there was more for later.



When white people came to Australia, they chopped down trees, built houses, roads and buildings and brought foreign plants and animals. They did not understand how the native plants, animals, land and water were connected and how their actions affected them.

Plants

Aboriginal people used a vast range of plants for various purposes, including making tools and implements, medicines, food (bush tucker), shelter and ceremonies and spirituality. Here are some of the plants that were used by Wiradjuri people in the Gundagai area.

Binyal (River Red Gum) is a large tree with a large spreading crown of fine drooping dull-grey green leaves; new growth may be a pinkish colour. The bark is rough and dark at the base. The smooth outer layer of bark was considered the best material for building large bark canoes and coolamons.



CREDIT: K. COLEMAN

Mumbil (Blackwood) wood is very hard. The bark is also heated in water and used to treat aching joints. Other medicinal purposes are as a body wash to treat cuts and sores, as a mouth wash and to treat infections and stomach cramps. Mumbil wood is used to make spear throwers and shields and the bark is used to make string. Like most garal (wattles), the seeds were collected and ground into cooking flour.



CREDIT: J. MCCOURT

Garradyang (Kurrajong) seeds can be used to make a coffee-like drink; young stems, leaves and roots are eaten raw; and the bark can be used to make string, rope, fishing nets, dilly bags and fishing line. Resin from the tree can be used for tool and implement making.



CREDIT: K. COLEMAN



Gundhay (Stringybark) is identifiable by its rough stringy bark. It is grey on the outside, but a reddish-brown when the outer layer has been removed; the bark is deeply cracked, giving it an “ironbark look”. Gundhay wood is reddish in colour, long lasting and very easy to work, making it highly desired by Aboriginal people. Gundhay has a wide range of uses, providing bark and timber to make tools, string and rope, shelters and to make fire.



Wilburugil (Snotty Gobbles or Mistletoe) are parasitic plants that grow on the branches of trees. The plant is spread by the aptly named mistletoe bird. Aboriginal people use the fruit of snotty gobbles in a similar way to chewing gum, by producing saliva they are able to quench their thirst.



Hill Indigo is a small shrub (barrinan) requiring some shade to survive the hot summer and was an important source of fish poison for Aboriginal people. The name Barrinan is a common reference to all small shrubs and bushes.



Creeping saltbush is a small barrinan that spreads across the soil surface, as its common name suggests. Typical of saltbush, it is a greenish-grey and has leaves with a white tinge of hairs, especially in dryer times. The small fruits produced mostly in the summer and autumn are used as dye and for food.

Biradur (Pig face) is often found growing underneath saltbush. It has fleshy, succulent leaves and bright purplish-pink flowers in late winter and spring. Wiradjuri people apply juice from the leaves to burns and blisters in a similar way to Aloe Vera.



Dirramaay (Chocolate lily) grows from a tuber each year and has strong chocolate scented flowers. The tubers are dug up and eaten raw or cooked on campfires.



Nidbul (Flax lily) occurs in large tussocks with leaves up to a metre long. There are a wide variety of Flax lilies and similar lily plants but they commonly have purple flowers and bright purple fruits that can be eaten.



Galagang (Bulbine Lily) is typical of many lilies found across the Riverina region. Its bulb is an important food source for Aboriginal people, which is dug up and roasted on a campfire.



Hunting and Tools

The local Wiradjuri people used a variety of tools and implements to survive. They used them for hunting, feeding their families and building shelters.

Boomerangs There were two different types of boomerangs used. The first were returning boomerangs which would come back to you and these were used for scaring animals when hunting or just to play with. The second type were non-returning boomerangs. These didn't return and were used to hit animals.

Emu callers

Emu callers are shaped like mini didgeridoos. You hold the emu caller with one hand cupping the side, while the other hand taps the top to make a similar sound to an emu. Male emus would be called off the nest so other members of the group could collect some eggs for food.

Stone axes

Stone axes (pictured right) were used to cut up timber, skinning animals, chopping down trees and making other implements like coolamons.

Digging sticks

Aboriginal people used digging sticks to dig up plants, roots (tubers) and to find animals buried in the ground. They were also used to try dig into the ground for some water when they were running out.

Woomera

A woomera is a spear thrower made out of a thick hollow stick. The woomera would be put up to your ear and then thrown towards your prey but still clutching the woomera.



Grinding stones grind seeds into flour.

Water rat teeth

Aboriginal people have lots of techniques for hunting. Water rats teeth can be used for skinning animals, opening mussels and sharpening rocks.

Fishing spears

Pronged spears were used to catch fish. If they saw a fish close to the edge they would throw their spears at the fish. When the fish was brought on the riverbank, they would bang it with a stick or against a rock to kill it.

Mussels

Mussels are found in the rivers or wherever they are located, then opened up and eaten raw or cooked - just like we do today.

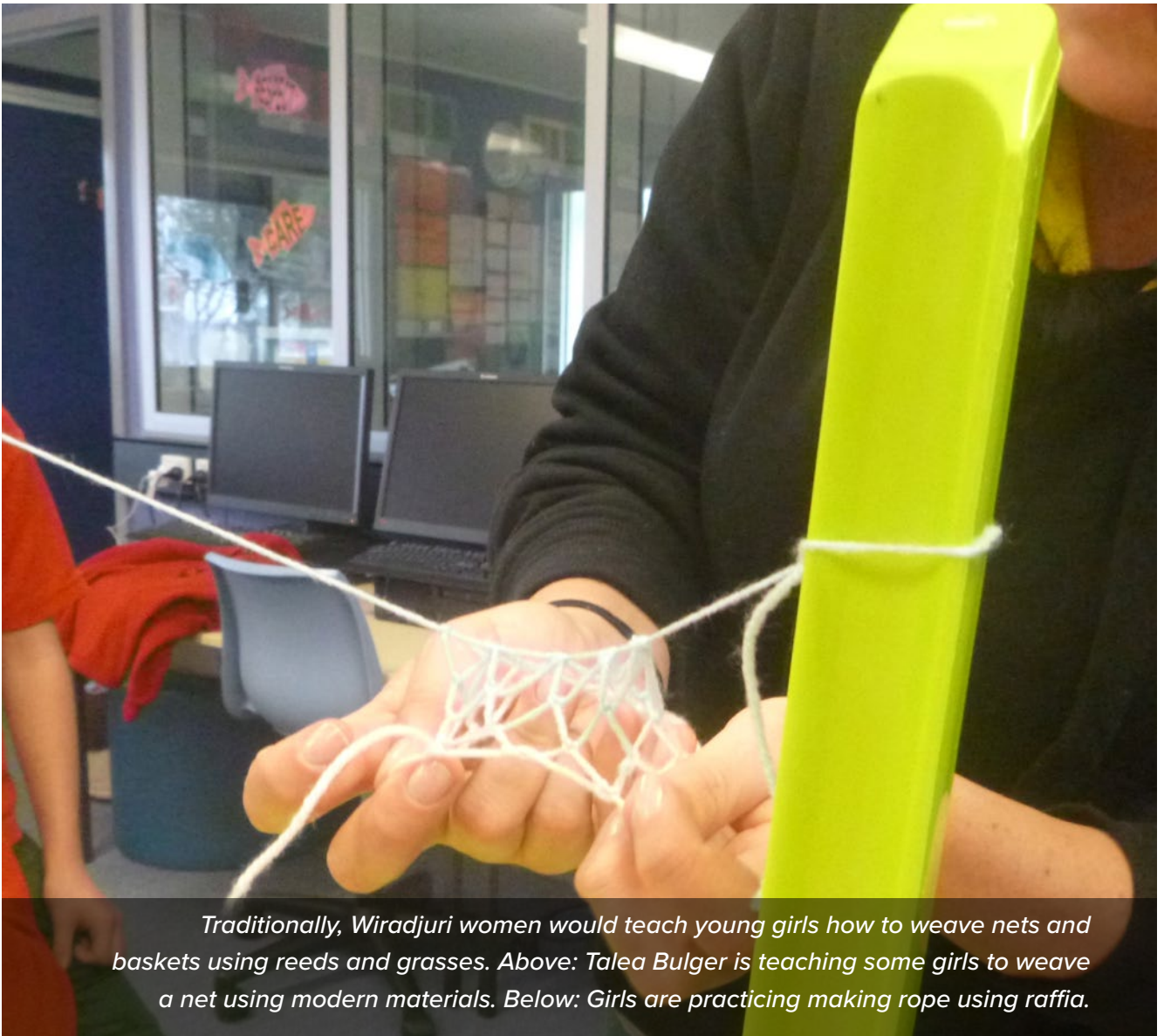
Nets and Ropes

Wiradjuri people peeled bark off Gundhay (stringybark trees) and then twisted it around to make ropes and string. They also used hair to make string. Women made nets and baskets by weaving grasses and reeds.

Coolamons

Coolamons are an implement that both men and women used to help carry food, water and even children. They are made by cutting out the bark from a tree and then drying it over a fire slowly. Coolamons can then be decorated to signify who it belongs to.





Traditionally, Wiradjuri women would teach young girls how to weave nets and baskets using reeds and grasses. Above: Talea Bulger is teaching some girls to weave a net using modern materials. Below: Girls are practicing making rope using raffia.

Gender roles and family

In Wiradjuri culture, the importance of family and the community is very high because living in a community is like having one big family where everyone cares for each other. Traditionally, local Wiradjuri had set rules to help them look after each other.

Women and men each had set rules and jobs they were responsible for. Women were responsible for teaching certain jobs and skills such as looking after children, weaving, gathering plants and smaller animals and making smaller implements like digging sticks. Men were responsible for teaching how to hunt and make and sharpen tools. Men and women generally could each do each other's jobs if it was needed but they couldn't teach other's jobs.





Elders

In Wiradjuri culture, history and laws are not written down, they are passed down orally through the generations by storytelling, dance, music and by telling stories of the Dreamtime when the world was being created. This is one of the roles of an Elder: they tell the stories of the history and the Dreamtime, they pass down the laws and customs and keep the culture alive.

Elders have a very important and significant role. Elders are always respected and shall never be dishonoured. Everyone knows they need to obey and protect their Elders.

Female Elders are called Aunty and male Elders are called Uncle.

We were very lucky to meet Aunty Phyllis (pictured) who is one of the Elders from Brungle. She shared her knowledge and stories with us.



Spirituality

Aboriginal spirituality is inextricably linked to the land. Like all Aboriginal people, the Wiradjuri people of the Gundagai area have a deep connection with the earth and do not believe that they own the land but think of themselves as looking after the land. They have strong beliefs and customs to help them live their lives.

Totems are animals that are significant to a family, region, community or individual person as a spirit guide that looks after them. People will show their respect to their totem and will not eat or hurt their totem animal. In Gundagai and Brungle region, the Wiradjuri totem is the gugaa (goanna) for all families. Some individual families also have other personal totems as well eg maliyan (wedge-tailed eagle)

Wiradjuri people in this area told many stories about other spirits and creatures. Some of these helped keep children and other people safe.

Bunyip

The Bunyip is a creature that lives in rivers where the water swirls and spirals. If children come down to the river without an adult and get too close the Bunyip might pull them under. This story helps keep children safe so they do not go into or near the water without an adult and they keep away from rips in the river.

Merriuula Dog

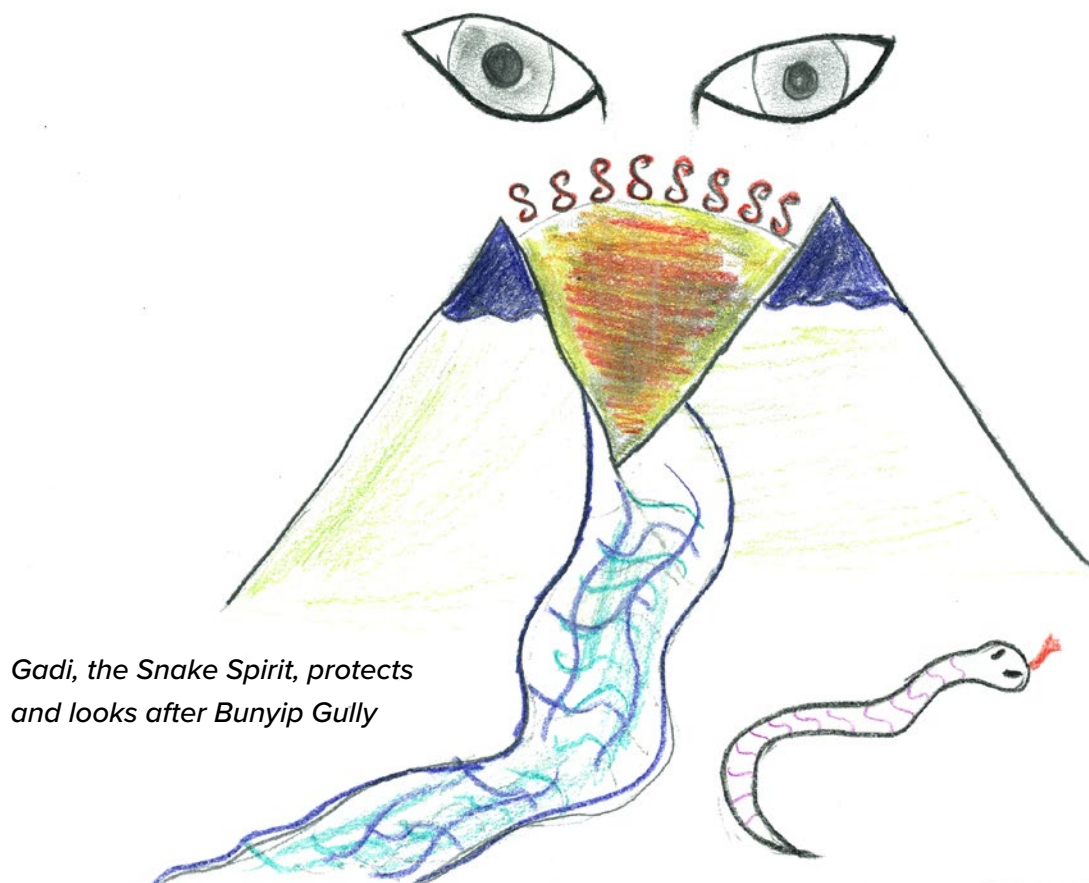
The Merriuula dog is a spirit dog that would come out after dark. Parents told children to be home before dark before the Merriuula dog came out. They said you would see its red eyes in the distance and as it got closer its eyes would get bigger and bigger.

Hairy Man / Mukki Man

The Hairy man, or Mukki man, also came out after dark and children were told they needed to be home before dark or else the Mukki man would get them.



Spirituality by Rylee Byrne



Gadi, the Snake Spirit, protects and looks after Bunyip Gully

Dreamtime Stories

Dreamtime stories were told to keep everyone safe and follow the tribe or family rules and guidelines. Aunty Phyllis from Brungle tells a local Dreamtime story from Brungle. It is the story of Gadi the snake spirit of Bunyip Gully.

In Brungle one night, two girls snuck away from the camp to go up to the mountains to meet up with two boys they had met at the Bogong moth ceremony. To get there, they had to go through a sacred area called Bunyip Gully where no one is allowed to go unless they have permission. Gadi, the snake spirit who looks after Bunyip Gully, saw the girls and knew they should not be there. He confronted the girls but they lied and said they were lost.

Gadi knew they were lying so he called on the other spirits to help him: Dinawan (the emu), Waagan (the crow) and Wambuwany (the kangaroo). These spirits snuck up behind the girls and helped Gadi trap the girls. They were punished for lying and also for coming into a sacred area without permission. They were banished from their tribe and no one ever saw them again.

The story about Gadi the Spirit of Bunyip Gully taught everyone to respect their Elders and the rules.

Ceremonies

Like people all around the world, the local Wiradjuri people had special ceremonies and celebrations which were an important part of their culture.

Importantly, men and women had their own special ceremonies and rituals for different occasions. Girls had special ceremonies for when they came of age and were old enough to start learning to be a woman. Similarly, boys also had their own ceremonies for when they were old enough to become men. Boys and men were not allowed to attend women's ceremonies and girls and women were not allowed to go to men's ceremonies.

At certain times of the year the Bogong moths were plentiful up in the Snowy mountain area. The local Wiradjuri would travel up to the mountains and come together with people from the Ngunnawal and Wolgalu nations. They would yarn (talk), trade and celebrate through song and dance. They would roast and eat the Bogong moths.



Print of Bogong moths by Rylee Byrne



Ceremony by Opal Kothe-Champion

Music and celebration

When the Wiradjuri came together to sing and dance they would decorate their bodies by painting them with ochre which is a natural paint made by mixing ochre powder with water. They also decorated their bodies with feathers from birds and strings made from plants.

Music was made with yiddakis (also known as didgeridoos) and clap sticks and also by clapping and stamping feet.

The yiddaki was only played by men. It is made with a hollow log and can be decorated or painted. Yiddakis originally came from Central Australia. Wiradjuri people got the yiddaki from these people by trading with them.

Clap sticks (pictured) could be played by both men and women. They are clapped together to make the beat just like drums.





Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people for their kind assistance.

Aunty Phyllis Freeman, a Wiradjuri Elder from Brungle who generously donates her time and energy to sharing her story and her knowledge of traditional Wiradjuri culture with us.

Shane Herrington and Talea Bulger, Aboriginal Discovery Rangers with National Parks and Wildlife Service who work with Elders and community to share and spread their vast knowledge of traditional Wiradjuri culture and customs. Shane is a Wiradjuri and Wolgalu man originally from Brungle and Talea is a Wiradjuri and Ngunnawal woman originally from Tumut.



Resources we referred to when creating this book include:

- ***South West Slopes Revegetation Guide***, 1998. Edited by Fleur Stelling.
- ***Wiradjuri Plant Use in the Murrumbidgee Catchment***, 2008. Compiled by Alice Williams and Tim Sides.



Wiradjuri Language

Numbers

- | | |
|----|------------------------------|
| 1 | Ngumbaay |
| 2 | Bula |
| 3 | Bulangumbaay |
| 4 | Bulabula (Bungu) |
| 5 | Marra |
| 6 | Mara ngumbaay |
| 7 | Mara bula |
| 8 | Marra bulangumbaay |
| 9 | Marra bulabula (Marra bungu) |
| 10 | Marra marra |

Animals

- | |
|---|
| Gadi – snake |
| Dinawan – emu |
| Waagan – crow |
| Wambuwany – kangaroo
(pronounced womboyne) |
| Gugaa - gonna |
| Maliyan – wedge-tailed eagle |
| Wandayali – echidna |
| Wambad – wombat |
| Biladurang – platypus |





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2016 Year 5 and 6, Gundagai South Public School

Congratulations!

Wirraminna Environmental Education Centre and
the Creative Catchment Kids Program won the
National 2016 Yates Junior Landcare Team Award.

