

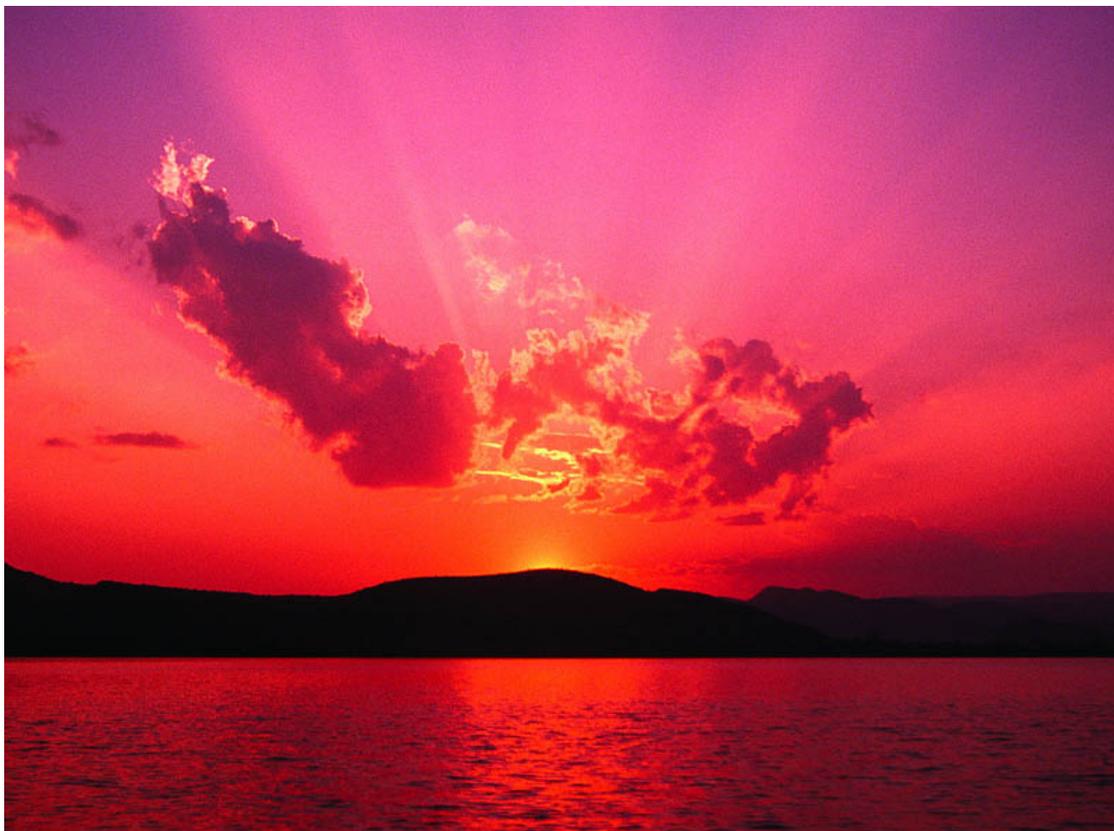
# What is Spirituality for Indigenous Australian?

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Spirituality for Indigenous Australians takes many forms. Its forms and practices have been profoundly influenced by the impact of colonialism, both past and present.

Some Indigenous Australians share the religious beliefs and values of religions introduced into Australia from other cultures around the world, particularly Europe. But for most people religious beliefs are derived from a sense of belonging—to the land, to the sea, to other people, to one's culture.

The form and expression of spirituality differs between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Aboriginal spirituality mainly derives from the stories of the Dreaming, while Torres Strait Islander spirituality draws upon the stories of the Tagai.



# What does Dreaming mean!!!

## Key Understandings

- The Dreaming refers to how people explain the beginning and the continuity of life
- The Dreaming is not fixed in the ancient era of creation. It continues in the spiritual lives of Aboriginal peoples today, and its influence is embedded in many aspects of everyday living
- The Dreaming heritage carriers' special obligation to protect and preserve the spirit of the land and the life forms that are part of it. The Dreaming heritage also influences codes of behaviours, laws, family and social structures, and sacred duties.
- Different aboriginal groups in Australia have their own Dreaming beliefs, dreaming stories and Spirit Ancestors.
- The Dreaming is passed on through a rich tradition of song, poetry, dance art and storytelling.

## The Dreaming Stories (Sometimes called Creation Stories)

- The Dreaming stories tell of aspects of Aboriginal lifestyles and law. They explain the creation of the land, the animals and the people. The Dreaming stories are a powerful way of educating young children about rules for living, the natural environment and the spiritual world.
- Some Dreaming stories are steeped in ritual and sacred ceremonies, while others are “campfire” stories for entertainment and/or moral instruction.
- Not all Dreaming stories are told in a complete or near complete sequence. Many Aboriginal people learn them over time, in the course of experience.
- Some Dreaming Stories are restricted. They are controlled by a few in the community, usually an elder or elders, who are the only people to tell or hear them, or perform associated rituals.
- Dreaming stories vary from region to region, and different versions of the same story will exist because of differences in emphases and interpretation amongst aboriginal groups.

## Spirit Ancestors

- When the earth was barely formed, the great Spirit ancestors made epic journeys across the land creating rivers, trees and rocks and naming plants and animals as sacred species for their descendants. The Spirit Ancestors taught Aboriginal peoples how to live in harmony with nature and how to behave towards one another, thus setting the pattern of Aboriginal cultures and identities.
- The Great Spirit Ancestors existed in human and natural forms and they were known by many different names, according to the beliefs of different regional groups.
- The Rainbow Serpent is the most frequently mentioned Spirit ancestor who features in many different ways throughout Australia.
- Aboriginal peoples, as descendants of the Spirit Ancestors, have custodial responsibilities for maintaining the Dreaming and for passing on the heritage of story, law and sacred ceremony.

## The Landscape and Sacred Sites

- Many Aboriginal people have a deep and instinctive sense of reverence towards the whole of the landscape. The land and environment is 'mother', and it is mother earth, which creates, nurtures, shelters and sustains aboriginal people.
- Many Aboriginal people have a fervent sense of belonging to the soil of their birthplace.
- Sacred sites for aboriginal peoples may be land formations – including rocks, waterholes, river or lakes – where something significant happened in the Dreaming. Spirit Ancestors and Dreaming heroes remain active in these places, and their powers or spirit can generate strength, harmony and peace, and alternatively, danger or fear.
- For Aboriginal people with traditional beliefs, the dreaming is very personal. Each person is linked with his or her dreaming. This is called their Totem.
- Food is interwoven with the rich spiritual life of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people believe that land, food and plants are part of a vast system created by ancestral spirits of the dreaming.
- Certain people have links with certain foods, e.g. it may be their totem. They may be forbidden to kill or eat their totem, except maybe at sacred ceremonies. There are many unwritten rules and these are verbally passed on by the people. Contact local people in your area for more localised information, eg. Mitakoodi of Cloncurry, Koopoorra kinship group cannot eat, iguana, whistling duck, carpet snake. Woongko cannot eat emu, kangaroo, and porcupine. This system worked excellently for even food distribution and food supplies were never exhausted.

The Dreaming: some “Quotable Quotes” For Classroom Displays

*The Dreaming is not fairy stories. To Aboriginal people it is a recording of the history of our people, the environment and living organisms.*

*Linda Burney*

Dreaming is...

- *When Dreaming Ancestors made the world*
- *When Dreaming ancestors made the laws, telling people and all living things how to live and behave*
- *Still going on now, because the Dreaming Ancestors still live in the land and its features, and they can influence the lives of Aboriginal people.*

*Education Department of South Australia.  
The Dreaming and the Environment K- 3*

Memories and laws of the Dreaming are kept alive through art, music and ceremonial life.

*The aborigines and the environment are but one, and all things on earth have a cycle, and they recycle. All rivers, trees, creatures and plants are alive just as we are, today and in the beginning. They are part of nature as we are, and our connection to all things natural is spiritual.*

*Pat Dodson*

*The land and environment is our Mother. Treat her with love and tenderness, nurture and never mistreat her, or take more than what is required*

*Vicki Walker*