Queensland Theatre Company presents

**Stradbroke Dreamtime**

*By Oodgeroo of the tribe Noonuccal*

Originally produced by Queensland Theatre Company and QPAC

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**Education Resources**
The activities and resources contained in this document are designed as the starting point for educators in developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Heidi Irvine is seconded to Queensland Theatre Company from Education Queensland as an Education Liaison Officer. You can contact Heidi on hirvine@queenslandtheatre.com.au

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About the Play

This is a tale of a place not far from home that takes audiences to the oldest living culture on earth. This performance is an adaption of celebrated poet, author and artist Oodgeroo’s book, Stradbroke Dreamtime. In this newly created work from Queensland Theatre Company and QPAC, Oodgeroo’s stories come to life on stage helping young audiences to share in her tales of growing up on Stradbroke Island.

What is The Dreaming?

The Dreaming means our identity as people. The cultural teaching and everything, that’s part of our lives here, you know… it’s the understanding of what we have around us.

During the Dreaming, ancestral spirits came to earth and created the landforms, the animals and plants. The stories tell how the ancestral spirits moved through the land creating rivers, lakes and mountains. Today we know the places where the ancestral spirits have been and where they came to rest. There are explanations of how people came to Australia and the links between the groups throughout Australia. There are explanations about how people learnt languages and dance and how they came to know about fire. In essence, the Dreaming comes from the land. In Aboriginal society people did not own the land it was part of them and it was part of their duty to respect and look after mother earth.

The Dreaming did not end with the arrival of Europeans but simply entered a new phase. It is a powerful living force that must be maintained and cared for.
Merv Penrith Elder, Wallaga Lake, 1996
Activities for the Classroom

Childhood stories of culture
Children collect photographs and objects of friends or loved ones that reflect cultural heritage and childhood.
- Encourage children to find out the stories behind the photos and objects.
- Collate the photographs into a book.
- Children collate photographs in a digital album on a desktop.
- Highlight the significant aspect of the image that suggests culture and childhood.
As the classroom becomes a timeline of childhood and culture, children reflect on past and present ways of living, for example in styles of clothing, toys, food, houses, household items, transport, and communication.

Stories of my town
On a map of Queensland locate and mark the towns/regions children live in.
- Provide an opportunity for children to share stories and teach each other about their town/regions such as events held in the suburb, sporting and other activities etc.
- If children are from the same places, group students to map places of interest.
- Encourage children to capture stories that happen in their community through a drawing or written component.

Museum Experiences
Ask children if they have been to a museum. If so, ask what they saw.
- Share the importance of museums with children.
Visit the North Stradbroke Museum online (or in person!) where the stories of Stradbroke Island have been kept.

Virtual Museums
Visit online virtual museums with children and browse through collections that reflect how a city or town has been captured.
- Connect the importance of museums to a personal level
- Where do children keep their precious things?
- What makes one object more precious than another?
- Talk about the idea of attachment.
- Why do we value certain things?
- Why is it important to save things from the past?
The Importance of Spirituality in Indigenous Culture

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.

Dreaming Stories

What are Dreaming Stories about?

Dreaming stories vary throughout Australia and there are different versions on the same theme. For example, the story of how the birds got their colours is different in New South Wales and in Western Australia.
Stories cover many themes and topics. There are stories about creation of sacred places, landforms, people, animals and plants. There are also stories of language or the first use of fire. In more recent times there are stories telling of the arrival of the first Europeans on ships or stories about trading with Macassan fisherman in northern Australia.

**The Tracks of Life**

The journey of the Spirit Ancestors across the land are recorded in Dreaming tracks. A Dreaming track joins a number of sites which trace the path of an Ancestral Being as it moved through the landscape, forming its features, creating its flora and fauna and laying down the Laws. One of these Spirit Ancestors is the Rainbow Serpent, whose Dreaming track is shared by many Aboriginal communities across Australia.

**Rainbow Serpent**

"And that... is the resting place of the Rainbow Serpent, and all of the gullies and all of the lagoon itself was about the Rainbow Serpent created after he had created the universe and all the dry gullies is the tracks that he's made looking for a resting place."

Carl McGrady, Aboriginal Education Assistant, Boggabilla, describing the path of the Rainbow Serpent at Boobera Lagoon, northern New South Wales, 1996.

The Rainbow Serpent is represented as a large, snake-like creature, whose Dreaming track is always associated with watercourses, such as billabongs, rivers, creeks and lagoons. It is the protector of the land, its people, and the source of all life. However, the Rainbow Serpent can also be a destructive force if it is not properly respected.

The Rainbow Serpent is a consistent theme in Aboriginal painting and has been found in rock art up to 6000 years old. The Rainbow Serpent is a powerful symbol of the creative and destructive power of nature. Most paintings of Rainbow Serpents tell the story of the creation of the landscape particular to an artist's birthplace. Some aspects of Rainbow Serpent stories are restricted to initiated persons but generally, the image had been very public. Today, most artists add personal clan designs to the bodies of Rainbow Serpents, symbolising links between the artist and the land.

**The Mimi Spirits**

The Mimi are tall, thin beings that live in the rocky escarpment of northern Australia as spirits. Before the coming of Aboriginal people they had human forms. The Mimi are generally harmless but on occasions can be mischievous. When Aboriginal people first came to northern Australia, the Mimi taught them how to hunt and cook kangaroos and other animals. They also did the first rock paintings and taught Aboriginal people how to paint.
The Tagai

"I'm as much a Torres Strait Islander irrespective of where I live because my feelings of being a Torres Strait Islander live inside me. It is not predicated by what is outside me, it is determined with my feelings and my spirituality."

Bilyana Blomely, Academic Co-ordinator, Lismore 1996

The people throughout the Torres Strait are united by their connection to the Tagai. The Tagai consists of stories which are the cornerstone of Torres Strait Islanders’ spiritual beliefs. These stories focus on the stars and identify Torres Strait Islanders as sea people who share a common way of life. The instructions of the Tagai provide order in the world, ensuring that everything has a place. One Tagai story depicts the Tagai as a man standing in a canoe. In his left hand, he holds a fishing spear, representing the Southern Cross. In his right hand, he holds a sorbi (a red fruit). In this story, the Tagai and his crew of 12 are preparing for a journey. But before the journey begins, the crew consume all the food and drink they planned to take. So the Tagai strung the crew together in two groups of six and cast them into the sea, where their images became star patterns in the sky. These patterns can be seen in the star constellations of Pleiades and Orion.
Where’s my Place?

Have students visit the Interactive Map of Indigenous regions on the ABC website (http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/)

Once they have explored the regions where they are from and close to, have them explore differences, commonalities and interesting facts about a chosen region. Students could even take a map of Australia (or the world, if their family background is from overseas) and create their own map.
A Dreaming Story
In the play we hear some of the traditional Dreaming stories. Below is an example of a Dreaming story, *Thukeri*. On the website below, you can also find learning and teaching resources.

THUKERI: A NGARRINDJERI DREAMING STORY
A story as told by Leila Rankine

This is a story about two men who lived on the shores of Lake Alexandrina. They belonged to the Ngarrindjeri people. The two men set off in their bark canoe to go fishing on the lake. They travelled along in the calm, cool waters until they came to their favourite fishing place called Loveday Bay, where they always caught the best and most delicious bream fish. In their language, this fish is called thukeri.

They found a good, sheltered spot among some high reeds, tied their canoe to the reeds at both ends, and then settled down to start fishing.

They had made their own fishing lines, called nungi, from cords they had made from reeds. They used very sharp wombat, kangaroo and bird bones for hooks and that morning, they had dug up plenty of worms and grubs to use for bait. They knew the women were collecting vegetable plants to eat with the fish. As the day went on, the two men sat there catching more and more fat, juicy thukeri and thinking about how they would taste after cooking them in the hot sizzling coals.

They were having such a wonderful day catching so many fish and wanted to keep catching more and more, but the canoe was almost full and looked like it would sink. So they untied their canoes from the reeds and very carefully paddled back towards the shore.

As they paddled closer to shore, they could see a stranger in the distance. He seemed to be walking straight towards them. The two men looked at each other. What if this stranger wanted some of their beautiful, juicy thukeri? They were greedy and decided not to share with the stranger.

Even though they had far more than their families could ever eat, they decided to keep all the lovely, fat, silver bream for themselves and quickly covered the fish up with their woven mats so that the stranger would not see them.

When the stranger came up to the two men, he said “Hello brothers, I haven’t eaten anything at all today. Could you spare me a couple of fish?”

The two men looked at each other and at the mats hiding the thukeri. They turned to the stranger and one of them said, “I’m sorry friend, but we caught only a few fish today and we have to take them home for our wives and children and the old people because they are depending on us. So you see we can’t give you any.”
The stranger stood there for a long while and then started to walk away. He stopped, turned around and stared at them. “You lied”, he said. “I know that you have plenty of fish in your canoe. Because you are so greedy you will never be able to enjoy those thukeri ever again.”

The two men stood there puzzled as the stranger walked away into the sunset. They shrugged their shoulders, then quickly took off the mats and began to gut the fish, but as they did this, they found that these beautiful silver thukeri were so full of sharp, thin bones that they couldn’t eat them. “What are we going to do? We can’t take these home to our families, they choke on them.”

So the two men had to return home in shame, with only the bony fish. When they got home they told their families what had happened. The old people told them that the stranger was really the Great Spirit called Ngurunderi. Now all the Ngarrindjeri people would be punished forever because the two men were so greedy! And so, today, whenever people catch a bony bream, they are reminded of long ago when Ngurunderi taught them a lesson.
Online Resources

Queensland Museum  

Museum Victoria  

Australian Museum  
http://australianmuseum.net.au/

National Museum of Australia  

Stradbroke Island Museum  

Indigenous history and learning resources  

Australian Education/Indigenous resources  

Education Queensland’s Indigenous resources and policies  
http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/indigenous/resources.html