


# Identity

The interconnections between cultural practices and identity is something that many Tasmanian Aboriginal people discuss. The article below provides evidence of these interconnections.

## CROSS CURRICULUM PRIORITIES

 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures

 Sustainability

## CONTENT AREAS

**H** History

**G** Geography

**T** Technologies

**H+PE** Health and Physical Education

**CC** Civics and Citizenship

**EB** Economics and Business

## GENERAL CAPABILITIES

 Intercultural Understanding

 Critical and Creative Thinking

 Literacy

## KEY CONCEPT

Identity is a person's conception and expression of their individuality or association with a group...identity refers to a person's sense of belonging to a group, culture or to a state, a region or the world.

Australian Curriculum

## SUPPORTING CONCEPTS

- › culture
- › fibres
- › technologies
- › belief systems
- › connection to land
- › sea, sky and waterways
- › ancestry

## GUIDING QUESTION

Why is a connection to the past an important part of Aboriginal identity?

This printed material is **to be used with Fibres – a Living Cultures multimedia curriculum resource** that can be found at [www.theorb.tas.gov.au](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au)

The Living Cultures Fibres resource and this supplementary printed material have been designed to foster culturally responsive practice when learning about Tasmanian Aboriginal Histories and Cultures.

# Introduction

Tasmanian Aboriginal people, culture and country are deeply interconnected. These relationships help us to understand identity and are linked to deep knowledge traditions and holistic world views. Identities and these connections have been a source of strength and resilience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over time. Identity, culture and Country continue to sustain them against the historic and contemporary impacts of colonisation.

Country is more than just the land, it's Community, culture, nature and spirituality all intertwined. Country is a place of belonging and a way of believing you feel like you're home in your Country.

Zoe Rimmer cited in *tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work*, 2017: 36

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## Part of an Aboriginal Being

Aunty Verna Nichols talks about the kelp being 'part of an Aboriginal being'. We can hear her say 'it makes me whole...it makes me who I am...it's all connected'.

The baskets are not empty. They are full of makers, their stories, their thoughts while making. The baskets are never empty. All of the thoughts jump out of the baskets onto all of us.

Nichols cited in *tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work*, 2017: Inside cover

It [fibre work] tells me a lot about our early people, about our mothers and their families and their movements in the seasons. The plants would be better in some areas than they would be in others, so it identifies movements in the Country or on the land, and that's so important as far as what I've got from first discovering the plant, to then discovering more about my own people.

Frost cited in *tayenebe: Tasmanian Aboriginal women's fibre work*, 2017: 27



Verna Nichols (left) and Leonie Dickson (right)  
Image: George Serras, National Museum of Australia

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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- › What do these quotes tell us about Tasmanian Aboriginal people's belief systems?
  - › What is the connection for Aboriginal people between working with natural materials and the spiritual and intellectual connection with the land, sea, sky and waterways?
  - › In what ways do Aboriginal people connect with culture and their ancestors through fibre work?
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# A Sense of Belonging

Aunty Verna Nichols shares with us a story about teaching young Aboriginal people to work with fibres and learn some of their culture. She says that even making a piece of string while spending time with the elders can connect so strongly that the young person feels perhaps for the first time as if they belong.



Kartanya Maynard being taught how to basket weave for the first time by her Aunty Muriel Maynard. | Image: Zoe Rimmer

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Why is a sense of belonging important to young Aboriginal people?
- › How do cultural practices help to shape a person's sense of identity and culture?

# Cultural Practice

Dave Gough has been relearning the the traditional practice of spear making. As Dave is working his spear he says:

You grow up hearing these things, like: I've got a bit of Aborigine in me. That's because they've been told they've got a bit. I want to get those ones that have got the bit, teach them their culture, show them who they really are [so that they can say] I'm Aboriginal, this is who I am. Get them proud, put their shoulders back, and then [see] a pathway forwards.



Dave Gough at spear-making workshop Tiagarra, 2017 | Image: ABC News, Sallèse Gibson

## DISCUSSION QUESTION

- › What does Dave's comment tell us about the importance of cultural practice to a person's sense of identity?

# Ancient Practices

Dave talks about his *bungana* ancestor, who was known as the man of wind and fire and that he would hold his firestick up to change the weather. *Bungana* is a language word meaning great chief or wise man.

George Augustus Robinson, so-called conciliator of Aborigines, while undertaking the Friendly Mission (1829-1834), recorded his own observations of this practice.

The aborigines have recourse to fire when they are desirous for the wind to alter. I have seen the chief stand up in the midst of the tribe, when the wind has set in front of their leebrunnee or hut, and thrust a firestick at the wind, and continue for half an hour together at this divination. The dances of the aborigines evidently consist in pyromancy,

but more particularly the dance of the TYRE.LORE or women from the islands. This Jumbo assured me was the case, that the song was the devil's song and their attitude is a homage paid to the fire spirits.

25 December 1830

Robinson cited in Plomley 2008: 334

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › Why is it important to Dave Gough to rekindle ancient practices?
- › What does this tell us about the importance of identity and connection to the past?

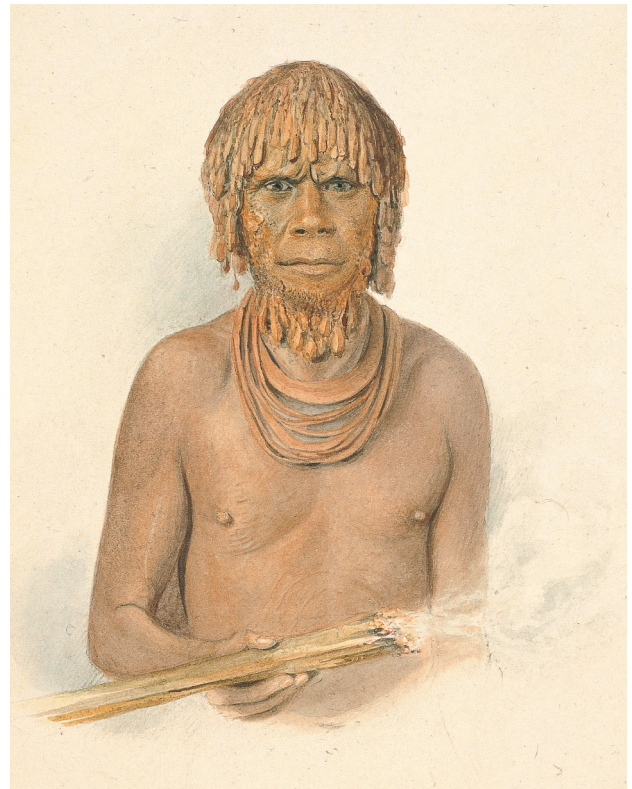
# Relearning Culture

To the right, we can see a painting of Dave's ancestor *Mannalargenna*, holding a firestick.

It's something I've got to improve on and work on, on my fire making skills. My great chief, *bungana*, was known as a man of wind and fire, so that's another reason why it's very important that I relearn and do this. It's a very important part of who I am to be able to connect back with that.

Dave Gough, 2017

*Manalargenna*, a Chief of the eastern coast of Van Diemen's Land (1837) | Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery





Dave Gough with a Firestick at Tiagarra, 2017 | Image: Dcnstreet Pty Ltd

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- › What does Dave tell us about the importance of learning culture for Aboriginal people?
- › What does the use of traditional materials in the past and present tell us about connection to country for Tasmanian Aboriginal people?

[www.theorb.tas.gov.au//living-cultures/fibres/teacher-drawer](http://www.theorb.tas.gov.au//living-cultures/fibres/teacher-drawer)

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## REFERENCES

2005. Bruny Island Camp. Hobart, Aboriginal Education Unit

2009. *tayenebe*: Tasmanian Aboriginal Women's Fibre Work. Hobart: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania

*Manalargenna*, a Chief of the eastern coast of Van Diemen's Land (1837)

Watercolour by Thomas Bock, 29.3 x 22 cm. Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery AG833

Plomley NJB, 2008, *Friendly Mission The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829 - 1834*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery and Quintus Publishing



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