

Australian Aborigines and the Dreamtime When the World was Created

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Aboriginal art showing Platypus, who survived the ancient flood. Getty Images

The Australian natives are generally called Australian Aborigines. Of all the peoples of the world, the Aborigines can claim the longest connection to a particular land after the migration of humans out of Africa. Scientific evidence indicates direct connections with the first wave of humans leaving Africa. Although estimates vary, it seems likely that the Aborigines have been in Australia for at least 40,000 years. It also seems like they didn't mix much with outside groups until the arrival of Europeans in the seventh century.

There are many groups across Australia called aboriginal. Aboriginal refers to people who are the original or earliest known people to live in a place. Each aboriginal group has its own beliefs and stories about nature, history or how the world began. The idea of Dreaming or Dreamtime exists in all of the Aborigine beliefs. Dreaming doesn't mean the same thing in English as it means for Aborigines. For Aborigines, The Dreaming is about the "Dreamtime" when spirits created the world.

There are many aboriginal groups, and many different gods. The following are some of the most important aboriginal gods.

Here comes the sun

For aboriginal groups in Australia, the sun is considered a female goddess. Her name is Alinga in some areas. In other areas she is called Wuriupranili. In southeast Australia she is Gnowee, who in Dreamtime, when the world was still dark, lost her son. She lights a torch and climbs the sky each day looking for him. In northern Australia the solar goddess can be Wala, who travels across the sky each day. In the west, Bila is a sun goddess who roasted humans each day over the fire that lit the world. To save humans, Kudnu, the Lizard Man, and Muda, the Gecko man, threw a boomerang at her. The weapon hurt her. She turned into a ball of fire, which ran off, leaving the world in darkness. Kudnu threw more boomerangs and finally caught the fireball in the east, from which direction it returns each day to warm and light the world.

As in most creation stories, the creator god is important in many aboriginal beliefs. In southeast Australia, Biame is the creator. Among the Bandicoot group in Aranda, Karora is the creator. In the north, some groups say the snake goddess Eingana is the creator. They believe that Eingana created water, animals and land in Dreamtime. Here is how the story goes: In the beginning Eingana could not give birth and became swollen with creation until the god Barraiya used his spear to cut an opening in her, which is how the world began.

There are many other important Dreamtime gods. Anjea in Queensland, a part of northeastern Australia, is a goddess of fertility. Fertility is the ability to have children. Julunggul in the north is another fertility goddess. She is a snake, like Eingana.

Two sets of sisters

In Arnhem Land, part of northeast Australia, the Djanggawul Sisters are important gods. Djanggawul was a child of the sun. He had two sisters. The three Djanggawuls traveled about the country in a canoe. They left holy marks on the ground in the lands they visited that are still present today, according to the story. The Djanggawuls also left "dreamings" in the form of stories and ceremonies. In each place where they stopped, Djanggawul and his sisters produced human beings.

Two sisters — from the north — are the Wawalag Sisters. They roam the world in Dreamtime, naming creatures and plants. They are swallowed and then regurgitated by the snake god Yurlunger. Another pair of gods known to the northern Gunwinggu people were Wurugag, the first male, and Waramurungundi, the first female. Waramurungundi is considered a Great Mother goddess who gave birth to the Earth.

Australian Aborigines have stories about characters known as tricksters. In the northern area Bamapana is a popular trickster. Like trickster characters in other cultures across the world, Bamapana doesn't care much about the line between right and wrong, and he causes a lot of disagreement between people. The Wurundjeri people have a more helpful trickster named Crow. In Dreamtime, Crow stole fire and enjoys playing tricks on other animals, such as Swamp Hawk and Eagle.

The story of the Goddess Yhi

All Australian aboriginal gods have a connection to the Dreaming and creation. In addition to the stories already reviewed here, there are complicated creation stories like the one about the Creator Goddess Yhi of the northern Karraur people.

Yhi lay sleeping in dark Dreamtime, before the world was created, when a strange whistling sound woke her up. As her eyes opened, the world became full of light. As the sun goddess, she brought wealth to the world through her light and warmth. As she journeyed around on foot during the Dreaming, she left plants everywhere she stepped, and soon the world was a plant paradise.

Yhi sat down and looked around her. She realized that as the plants could not move from place to place, she needed to create something that could. The sun goddess traveled under the earth and ran into evil spirits who tried to destroy her. But her light and warmth defeated them, and beautiful dancing things came from that warmth and light — butterflies and other insects — which Yhi led up to the upper world.

Then she used her powers on the caves of ice in the high mountains. Water, full of fish, flowed into the world. Birds and other animals were freed from the caves. Yhi blessed the new creatures and told them she would now return to her own world. As she moved away, darkness came over everything, and the new creatures were afraid. But sleep came and then the dawn, as Yhi climbed across the sky, and the creatures celebrated.

This pattern went on through Dreamtime until the creatures became unhappy. So once again Yhi came down to earth and asked her creations what was bothering them. The creatures all wanted something they did not have. The bat wanted wings, the seal wanted to swim; everything wanted something new, so Yhi gave them what they wanted and returned to the sky. Now Yhi had created a male human but realized that the male required a woman. So, as the male slept one day, Yhi created a beautiful flower on a grass tree. The male was drawn to the flower. The flower became a woman and the first man and woman joined hands.

Lizards tried to destroy platypuses

Most Australian Aboriginal tribes have stories about floods. One example comes from southeast Australia. As the story goes, the world had become overpopulated with birds, reptiles and other animals, so a meeting was called to decide how to fix the problem.

The meeting happened on a place called Blue Mountain. Tiger Snake began by sharing the idea that birds and animals who could move easily should move to a new country. The next day the lizards, who knew how to make it rain by performing a ceremony, decided to act. Their desire was to rid the world of the platypuses, a mammal with a beak that lives on both water and land, and lays eggs. The lizards instructed all of their family to perform the rain ceremony just before the new moon. The lizards fled to mountaintops, but a huge flood covered the land below, and most of the world was destroyed. The flood finally ended and there were no platypuses. But sometime later the cormorant, a type of bird, told the emu, another type of bird that he had seen a platypus-beak mark near a river. In fact, the platypuses were hiding from the other creatures. Kangaroo called the animals together and suggested they search for the platypuses. After some time Carpet Snake discovered the platypus home. Again Kangaroo called the animals together, and the lizard was expelled for his cruelty. And the animals discovered that in one way or another they were related to the platypuses. The platypuses were invited back and treated with much respect. Eventually, the

head platypus married into the bandicoot family. But platypuses have never been comfortable with other animals.

As in the case of Chinese creation stories, it is difficult to determine the difference between gods and heroes. Some heroes in stories of the Aborigines are I'wai in Queensland and Warrunna in New South Wales. These figures taught people how to live by laws and traditions and how to survive. Bunjil in Victoria does all these things, but he is also a creator and, therefore, in some sense a god. As a humanlike hero, he once took shelter in a cave in Dreamtime, and that cave remains a holy place today.

Quiz

1 Read the following detail from the section "Here comes the sun."

As in most creation stories, the creator god is important in many aboriginal beliefs.

HOW does this detail develop the CENTRAL idea of the article?

- (A) It identifies a connection between the differing creation stories developed by aboriginal groups.
- (B) It suggests that different aboriginal creation stories revolve around the same god.
- (C) It highlights the idea that aboriginal groups were the first to develop creation stories.
- (D) It establishes a relationship between the creation of the world and the development of different religions.

2 Which statement would be MOST important to include in an accurate and objective summary of the article?

- (A) Aboriginal stories survived throughout 40,000 years of migrations to different locations.
- (B) Aboriginal stories that originated during the Dreamtime period uniquely focused on the interactions of animals.
- (C) Aboriginal stories undoubtedly conflicted with other cultures' ideas and beliefs about creation.
- (D) Aboriginal stories provided explanations about the geography and creatures of Earth.

3 HOW effective is the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] at introducing Australian Aborigines?

- (A) Very effective; it defines the key similarities across these diverse groups of people and provides a description of some of their important beliefs.
- (B) Effective; it provides information about where and when these people lived, but does not describe their cultural beliefs or practices.
- (C) Somewhat effective; it lists areas where these groups of people lived, but does not explain why they had limited interaction with others.
- (D) Ineffective; it fails to mention any specific details about how these different groups of people are connected or the types of beliefs their different cultures developed.

4 What is the MAIN reason WHY the author includes the section "Two sets of sisters"?

- (A) to give examples of the memorable kinds of tricks aboriginal characters played
- (B) to introduce examples of different aboriginal gods and describe some of their mythical actions
- (C) to analyze which goddesses were most popular among aboriginal communities
- (D) to suggest that animals played a central role in all aboriginal mythical stories