Lesson Title: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

Stage: Year 7 & 8 - Stage 4

Year Group: 12-14 years old

Resources/Props:
National Gallery of Australia website information page:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art: Ramingining Artists-Central Arnhem Land: The Aboriginal Memorial 1987-88
National Gallery of Australia website link:
Collection: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art
National Gallery of Australia website information page:
Collection Highlights: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art: The Kimberley Freddie Timms: Blackfella whitefella
Choice of pens, pencils, charcoal or paints
Choice of black cardboard, canvas or composition board
Homework Task: National Gallery of Australia video streaming channel: Indigenous art

Language/vocabulary:
Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, significant, purpose, commemorate, respect, Australian, European settlement, represent, totemic, ochre, unified, celebration, connections, ancestral, transition, regeneration, memorial, collection, tradition, history, contemporary, forms, diversity, inspiration, designs, patterns, ancestors, ritual, engravings, style, influences, mediums, materials, visual elements, critical thinking, analysis, racism, oppression, political, provocative, perception, social, hierarchy, inequality, visual representation, symbols, ceremonial, iconography, figurative, abstract, geometric, cross hatching, interpretation, Indigenous

Lesson Overview:
In this lesson, students will be introduced to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art contained within the National Gallery of Australia. They will understand the significance of The Aboriginal Memorial and its importance in commemorating the lives lost since European settlement.

Students will be able to view a variety of different works of art created by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Through a process of critical analysis, they will be able to identify the forms of each work of art and will come to understand the rich diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and its ability to link the past with the present in dynamic, lively and thought provoking ways. Students will be given opportunities to explore in more depth, the works of art from a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Students will use their gained knowledge of the different forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to experiment with a variety of mediums to create their own interpretation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work of art.
Aims and Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson students will:

- Identify *The Aboriginal Memorial* and explain its significance
- Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art as rich and diverse, 'simultaneously connected to the past and engaged with the present'
- Identify the different forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and, from a range of examples, select one work of art to represent this form
- Critically analyse an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work of art and provide justifications for choices
- Choose appropriate materials when engaging in an art making experience
- Investigate a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artist
- Compare and contrast Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art with other cultures

Australian Curriculum:

**Key Learning Area: Visual Arts**

- Analyse how artists use visual conventions in artworks (ACAVAR123)
- Experiment with visual arts conventions and techniques, including exploration of techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, to represent a theme, concept or idea in their artwork (ACAVAM118)
- Identify and connect specific features and purposes of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore viewpoints and enrich their art-making, starting with Australian artworks including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACAVAR124)

**Key Learning Area: History**

- Analyse primary and secondary sources to identify values and perspectives on people, actions, events, issues and phenomena, past and present (ACHASSI157)
- The significant beliefs, values and practices of Indian or Chinese society, with a particular emphasis on ONE of the following areas: everyday life, warfare, or death and funerary customs (ACHASSK179)
- The way of life in ONE Polynesian society, including social, cultural, economic and political features, such as the role of the ariki in Maori and in Rapa Nui society (Easter Island) (ACDSEH066)

Cross-curriculum Priorities:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures
- Asia and Australia’s Engagement with Asia

General Capabilities:

- Critical and creative thinking
- Personal and social capability
- Intercultural understanding
- Ethical understanding
- Literacy
Teacher Lesson Plan
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

ScOT Catalogue Terms:
Composition (Visual Arts), Torres Strait Islander art, Aboriginal art, Australian art, Social settings (Narratives), Artistic purpose, art materials

Higher Order Thinking Skills:
Theory: Bloom’s Taxonomy
Levels addressed:

1. Knowledge – Exhibits memory of previously learned material by recalling fundamental facts, terms, basic concepts and answers about the selection.

2. Comprehension – Demonstrates understanding of facts and ideas by organising, comparing, translating, interpreting, giving descriptors and stating main ideas.

3. Application – Solves problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge, facts, techniques and rules in a different, or new way.

4. Analysis – Examines and breaks information into parts by identifying motives or causes. Makes inferences and finds evidence to support generalisations.

5. Synthesis – Compiles information together in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions.

6. Evaluation - Presents and defends opinions by making judgments about information, validity of ideas or quality of work based on a set of criteria.

Introduction: (10 minutes)

1. Conduct the pre-lesson pop quiz.
   • Where is the National Gallery of Australia located?
     Canberra, ACT
   • What is The Aboriginal Memorial displayed in the National Gallery of Australia?
     A collection of 200 hollowed log coffins, commemorating Australia’s Aboriginal peoples, who have lost their lives through colonial occupation since 1788.
   • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples used a variety of mediums and materials to create and display their works of art. Can you name any of these?
     Bark, wood, canvas, composition board, paint, natural earth pigments, watercolour, batik, pencil, ink, linen, charcoal, prints, photographs. etc.
   • Which of these words describe the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art?
     Diverse, rich, lively, surreal, positive, negative, dynamic, political, social, creative, provocative, abstract, simple, engaging.
   • What are some of the techniques used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to create works of art? Have these changed over time? If so, how?
     There are many techniques and styles used by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including dot painting, naturalistic/figurative techniques, drawings, bark and rock engravings, textiles and objects. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have incorporated technology into their works of art including photo media, screen prints and digital prints.
2. Introduce the students to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art contained within the National Gallery of Australia; by viewing the information page (video) Ramingining Artists-Central Arnhem Land: The Aboriginal Memorial 1987-88. Encourage students to recognise the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and its significance and purpose. Discuss:

- What was the purpose of creating this particular work of art?
  To commemorate and show respect to Australian Aboriginal peoples who lost their lives defending their land, through Colonial settlement since 1788.

- What does the work of art represent?
  The 200 hollowed log coffins, one for each year since European settlement (up to 1988) represents: 'a forest of souls', a war memorial and the final rights for all Aboriginal people denied a proper burial.

- How was this work of art created?
  A tree hollowed out by termites is cut, cleaned and painted with the clan's or individual totemic designs.

- The work is unified by what common themes?
  The celebration of life; respect for the deceased; people's connections with their Ancestors; transition and regeneration.

3. Explain to the students that The Aboriginal Memorial is one of many collections which can be seen in the National Gallery of Australia. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have existed in Australia for tens of thousands of years and their art and traditions are amongst the oldest and richest in human history. The art of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians takes many forms. Despite significant change and diversity, the art retains an 'underlying unity of inspiration - the land and the people's relationship with it. It simultaneously connected to the past and engaged with the present'.

4. Ask the students to recall how the designs, patterns and stories taught to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, by their ancestors, are reinforced and replicated. Answers should include: through ritual, dance, song, body painting, rock engravings and objects.

Main Body of Teaching: (40 minutes)

5. Divide students into twelve groups. Provide each group with one of the following forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art. Explain to the students that each one represents a different style of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, encompassing both traditional and contemporary art forms.

- **Group 1**: 19th Century objects
- **Group 2**: Early Western Desert Paintings 1971-1974
- **Group 3**: Desert Paintings from 1975
- **Group 4**: Hermannsburg School
- **Group 5**: The Kimberley
- **Group 6**: Textiles
- **Group 7**: Early Bark Paintings and Sculpture-Pre 1980
- **Group 8**: Print and Drawings
- **Group 9**: Urban
- **Group 10**: Photo Media
- **Group 11**: Bark Paintings-Post 1980, North Queensland and Tiwi Islands
- **Group 12**: Torres Strait Islands
6. Each group reads a description about their given form to gain insight into the style, influences, mediums and materials used to create their works of art. (See Appendix 1: Collections: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art).

7. Display a selection of twelve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art images from the NGA’s collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art one example from each of the assigned groups. Display these images digitally using the provided weblink on any device, such as an interactive whiteboard or tablet. Alternatively, the images in Appendix 2A can be printed out, laminated and used as part of a class display if you are unable to access the NGA website.

8. Generate a class discussion on the selection of works of art displayed by comparing and contrasting each of the images provided. Areas to discuss include subject matter, time period, underlying themes, materials and mediums used as well as the visual elements of each of the works of art.

9. Invite each group to select one work of art that best accompanies their given form. Help to facilitate this activity by questioning their choices; directing them to the subject matter, comparing the time periods of each work of art and the materials used and encouraging critical thinking and analysis. If students experience difficulty choosing an image, or if two or more groups choose the same image, encourage the groups to discuss their choices to find the answer with the best fit.

10. Provide each group with an opportunity to justify why they chose their particular image. For example: Group 9 - Urban; we chose image 3 because it addresses the issue of racism and oppression through the visual representation. Cigarette butts were stubbed out on the faces of Aboriginal men, women and children in an ash tray. It is a political statement and engages the audience in a provocative way. (See Appendix 2B for teacher notes: sample answers).

11. Students use a sheet of black cardboard, canvas or composition board and a variety of different coloured pens, pencils, charcoals and paints. Ask them to listen to the first 1.10 minutes of the National Gallery of Australia information page: Freddie Timms’ Blackfella whitefella which provides information about the artist’s early life, his painting style, influences and themes prevalent in his works. For the remaining 30 seconds, students listen to the description of Timms’ painting Blackfella whitefella which describes his work as a ‘perception of Australia’s political and social hierarchy. Against a black textured background, from top to bottom, four different shapes represents; the dominant white culture, then Asian culture, African and at the bottom, the Australian Aboriginal. The inequality based on race’.

**Task:** Using their choice of materials and surface, students recall their knowledge of the different forms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art to create a visual representation of Freddie Timms’ Blackfella whitefella based on the description given. Students consider the following:

- What colours they will use to draw the four perspectives
- How they will use the space provided, considering size and proportions, to portray the idea of ‘inequality based on race’
- What shapes or symbols they will use to represent the four perspectives
- What form or style will they emulate to represent their work of art
  - For example: ceremonial iconography, figurative or abstract, bold and sublime, geometric patterning, x ray designs, cross hatching, drawings, and/or inclusion of ritual objects
12. Display a variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander works of art, contained within the National Gallery of Australia, as inspiration for their own creative efforts.

13. Students can commence this task during the lesson if time allows but should be provided with opportunities; post the introductory lesson, to complete the creative component. Once the works of art have been completed, display Freddie Timms' *Blackfella, whitefella* painting to allow for comparison between their interpretation and the original depiction. See Appendix 3.

### 14. Extension activity:

- Two cultures are listed below depending on year group:
  - Year 7: China
  - Year 8: Polynesia
- Students investigate the works of art for their chosen culture contained within the National Gallery of Australia by using the NGA website as a primary resource.
- Students compare the works of art from their chosen culture to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art.
- Students use a variety of primary and secondary sources to research physical features, roles of key group and significant beliefs, values and practices of their chosen culture.

### Conclusion: 10 minutes

15. Conduct the post-lesson pop quiz using the interactive whiteboard.

- What is one reason why the National Gallery of Australia exhibits *The Aboriginal Memorial*?
  
  "To recall and show respect to the many Aboriginal Australians who lost their lives from 1788 due to colonial occupation."

- Describe the style of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in three words.
  
  "Responses will vary but may include: diverse, rich, political, social, provocative, thought provoking, unity, celebration, complex, functional, aesthetic, historical, dynamic, powerful, sacred, sublime, ceremonial, abstract, colourful, bold, traditional, intellectual etc."

- Name one contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art style/form.
  
  "Urban, prints, photomedia"

- In one sentence, describe Freddie Timms' *Blackfella, whitefella* painting.
  
  "'Blackfella, whitefella' is a political piece depicting, through symbol and imagery, the hierarchy of the different cultures with the Aboriginal peoples at the bottom."

- Choose one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander work of art and identify its form.
  
  "Responses will vary (refer to Appendix 1)."

### Homework Task:

16. Ask a parent's permission to visit the video streaming channel on the National Gallery of Australia website. Students navigate to the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art’ menu and choose one of the following artists to research.
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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

- Albert Namatjira
- Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri
- Julie Dowling
- Emily Kam Kngwarray
- Rover Thomas (Joolama)
- Lorna Brown Napanangka
- Alec Mingelmanganu
- David Malangi
- Robert Campbell Jnr
- Paddy Jupurrurla Nelson

Activity:
1. Listen to the information provided in the video
2. Annotate the key facts about its content including:
   - The name of the work of art
   - When it was painted or created
   - Materials and mediums used
   - Subject matter, themes or ideas
3. Choose one of the following activities to present your understandings.
   - Write 5-10 comprehension questions
   - Create a detailed mind map
   - Write a concise report
   - Write a mock interview with the artist
   - Make a pamphlet
   - Create 5-10 flashcards or trivia questions
Appendix 1

Collections: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art

Information from the National Gallery of Australia website link: Collections: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Collection: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art

**Group 1: 19th century objects**

These works of art were made in the 1800s. While little is known about the artists who created them, these objects represent: the diversity of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture, the rich cultural knowledge of their creators, the complexity of the culture and the historical depth of the collection. These works are both functional and aesthetic.

**Group 2: Early Western Desert Paintings 1971-1974**

During the period, 1971-74, a new and dynamic painting movement emerged from the Aboriginal community of Papunya in central Australia. These Luritja, Pintupi, Warlpiri and Anmatyerr men began the works of art using acrylic paints on board and canvas. These works of art depicted stories from the ancient past. Each painting referenced the land and law associated with a specific region as taught to the people by the Ancestors and to make a powerful statement about Aboriginal culture. The artists used ceremonial iconography – where images and symbols are used to portray a subject, movement or ideal. It was previously applied on sacred ritual objects, in body designs and ceremonial ground paintings to celebrate the beauty, richness and complexity of their culture.

**Group 3: Desert Paintings from 1975**

The Desert Painting movement has developed into a dynamic arts industry since its beginnings in Papunya during the early 1970s. These paintings from the Western, Gibson and Great Sandy desert regions no longer use traditional iconology (unlike the desert paintings from 1971-74) or natural ochres. The paintings are colourful, figurative (works of art representing forms that are recognisably derived from life) or abstract, bold and sublime (beauty) and depict a freedom of style and content. Dreaming narratives of the Ancestors coexist with depictions of historical and contemporary events.

**Group 4: Hermannsburg School**

At the Hermannsburg Mission, Albert Namatjira created paintings using watercolour to express a deep relationship with his Arrarnta country. He learnt watercolour painting from Australian artist Rex Battarbee in 1936. Namatjira taught the watercolour technique to his children and other members of the community, who have continued painting in this style at Hermannsburg to this day.

**Group 5: The Kimberley**

The Kimberley region of Western Australia is renowned for the Wandjina figures (the supreme creator and symbol of fertility, regrowth, renewal and rain) painted on rock walls.
Appendix 1

Group 6: Textiles

Batik and printed textiles created by Aboriginal artists are an important art form and highly regarded.

Two separate groups from central Australia (the Pitjantjatjara women and the Anmatyerr and Alyawarr women) embraced the traditional Javanese silk batik technique in 1972 and the early 1980s, using their own cultural imagery often related to body painting and plant life.

The delicate textiles, with their layered bands of translucent desert colours, capture the intensity and textured density of the local landscape.

Group 7: Early Bark Paintings and Sculpture-Pre 1980

Rich visual imagery has existed in the Arnhem Land region for tens of thousands of years. Most prominent are the paintings on the rock surfaces in western Arnhem Land.

Other forms include body painting for ceremonies with intricate and significant clan designs associated with the Dreaming, stories of the Ancestors painted on bark, and ritual objects elaborately decorated with coloured ochres, fibre, hair string and feathers.

The sculptured carvings from this region are often depictions of the Ancestors in either human or animal form. The bark painting tradition features both figurative and abstract imagery, including X-ray designs and rarrk or crosshatching.

Group 8: Print and Drawings

From the earliest days of European settlement, Aboriginal Australians have used European art materials with many of these drawings depicting images found in traditional body painting and rock engravings, or of everyday, ceremonial life or political message.

From the 1960s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists embraced the art of print making. The first prints were by land rights activist Kevin Gilbert. The prints of the 1970s and 1980s feature political themes.

Group 9: Urban

The works of art of urban-based artists address the political, historical and cultural nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art engaging with the issues in intellectual, provocative and often humorous ways.

Statements regarding identity, community, connections to country, racism and race relations, oppression and subjugate (to bring under control and make submissive) are artistically explored.

History is retold from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personal perspective by artists who have explored the oral histories and archives and reinterpreted the stories from the past.

These artists assert their point of view while experimenting in various media and works from all art forms. The do this to convey their powerful message of survival and pride in their cultural heritage.

Group 10: Photo Media

For many years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists have used photomedia (photography and image creation) to make statements about their identity, history and representation.
Appendix 1

In these works, rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being the subject matter, artists have instead reasserted their voice and personal perspective.

**Group 11: Bark Paintings-Post 1980, North Queensland and Tiwi Islands**
The art from far north Queensland celebrates ancient traditions in contemporary forms of painting, sculpture and ceramics.
Its origins lie in body designs for ceremony, traditional rock art and ritual objects. Its themes are both ancestral and present-day in nature.
Variations exist between regions in both artistic styles and practices. The area, known as the Top End, covering western, central and north-east Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands, depicts Dreaming narratives where artists use natural earth pigments.
Ritual objects made from wood, fibre, feathers or a combination of all these materials, are ochred and decorated.

**Group 12: Torres Strait Islands**
The art from the Torres Strait Islands is stylistically distinct from mainland Aboriginal Australia. It is influenced by their immediate neighbours in Papua New Guinea and is closely aligned with Pacific art traditions.
Artists in this region demonstrate great skill and sophistication as seen in the elaborate Torres Strait Islander masks.
Printmaking is a more recent but rapidly developing art form, with artists drawing on their ancient carving and storytelling traditions to convey the narratives of their Ancestors.
Appendix 2A

Image 1

Unknown artist
Jawun [Bicornual basket]
19th to 20th century
Fibrework, basket, lawyer cane


Image 2

Lily Karadada
Wandjina 1991
Paintings, natural pigment on canvas

Appendix 2A

Image 3

Tony Albert
Ash on me 2008
Sculptures, installation, vintage ashtrays on vinyl lettering

Image 4

Margaret Rinybuma
Michael Gadjawala
Golbordok (traditional bush honey-collecting bag) 1989
Sculptures, fibrework, natural earth pigments on pandanus fibre
Appendix 2A

Image 5

Mick Namarari
*Women's Dreaming* c. 1973
Paintings, synthetic polymer paint on composition board

Image 6

Gail Mabo
*Ketail (wild yam)* 2010
Prints, ink, paper linocut, printed in black ink, from one block
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Appendix 2A

Image 7

Tommy McRae
Sydney Tribe, New South Wales 1890s
Drawings, sketchbooks, drawings in pen and iron gall ink

Image 8

Albert Namatjira
Ghost Gum c. 1948
Drawings, watercolours, watercolour painting in watercolours
Appendix 2A

Image 9

Peter McKenzie
Protest March against First Fleet re-enactment at La Perouse Beach, January 1988
Photography, gelatin silver photograph

Image 10

Tjungkara Ken
Seven Sisters 2012
Paintings, synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Appendix 2A

Image 11

Birrikitji Gumana
Hunting story c. 1969
Painting, bark paintings, natural earth pigments on eucalyptus bark

Image 12

Gertie Huddleston
We All Share Water 2001
Paintings, synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Appendix 2B

Teacher Copy

Group 1: 19th century objects
(Image 1)

Group 2: Early Western Desert Paintings
1971-1974
(Image 5)

Group 3: Desert Paintings from 1975
(Image 10)

Group 4: Hermannsburg School
(Image 8)

Group 5: The Kimberley
(Image 2)

Group 6: Textiles
(Image 4)

Group 7: Early Bark Paintings and Sculpture-
Pre 1980
(Image 11)

Group 8: Print and Drawings
(Image 7)

Group 9: Urban
(Image 3)

Group 10: Photo Media
(Image 9)

Group 11: Bark Paintings-Post 1980, North
Queensland and Tiwi Islands
(Image 12)

Group 12: Torres Strait Islands
(Image 6)
Appendix 3

Freddie Timms *Blackfella whitefella*
1999