



**EARLY YEARS  
(AGES 3–5)**

# Country

## EDUCATOR RESOURCE

Created in collaboration with First Nations cultural advisers

Aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework v2.0

Written by teachers for teachers

AUSTRALIANS  
TOGETHER

**Warning:** This resource may contain images, voices and names of deceased persons, and references to language or events that may be considered culturally sensitive, offensive or outdated.

**Language note:** It's important to consider the historical context and evolving nature of language when viewing the information in this resource. While it may not be our preferred language, Australians Together at times uses or includes terms necessary for context, due to the educational nature of our content.



## Essential question

How can looking, listening and moving carefully help us connect with Country?



### Before teaching

#### Embedding First Nations perspectives

Accessing sources from First Nations perspectives, which contain information from First Nations people about histories and cultures, is the best way to embed this learning for your students. If you're concerned about trying to teach First Nations cultures, an important step to avoid this is to identify who the information comes from that you'd like to share. Look for sources created by First Nations people or in collaboration or consultation with First Nations people and published with their permission. This could be in written, video or audio formats. Make the most of the opportunity to point out reliability identifiers to students, such as who created or contributed to the source material. Recognising sources is also useful for showing students that what they learn always has a source and they should be assessing their own sources all the time.

And remember the rich diversity of First Nations cultures and Peoples – one First Nations perspective does not equal all First Nations perspectives.

#### Country

To prepare for discussing and learning about **Country** with your students, read the article, '[The importance of land](#)' (635 words, 2-minute read) from *Australians Together*, and watch the video of First Nations people sharing the ways they understand and relate to land (02:18).

In their book, *Nganga: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Words and Phrases*, Aunty Fay Muir and Sue Lawson describe First Nations people's understanding of Country:

A simple explanation is that for Aboriginal people, Country is their mother. If you don't look after your mother, she won't look after you. If Aboriginal people don't care for Country, Country won't be able to supply food and shelter.

In Aboriginal culture, Country is more than the land. It is the sea, sky, the rivers, seasons, plants and animals. Country is a place of belonging, heritage and culture. Country is not only the land where a person belongs, but their clan's Dreaming. Country encompasses how Aboriginal people, the land, their spirituality and law are interwoven. (2018, p.37)

For your own learning, you may wish to read the article, '[Who is Country?: Why I capitalise Animals, Rivers, Coolamons and Storms](#)' (963 words, 4-minute read), by [Walbunja-Yuin](#) woman Sara Kianga Judge, for the Australian Museum, to gain a deeper understanding of who, not *what*, is Country.

## Deep listening

One of the activities in this guide is inspired by the First Nations concept of *dadirri* (da-did-ee), which is a spiritual and cultural practice of deep listening and silent awareness originating from [Ngan'gikurunggurr](#) and [Ngen'giwumirri](#) languages of Peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia).

Just as we wouldn't ask children to recreate First Nations artwork or Dreaming, as they're cultural practices, it's also inappropriate for the actions the children are undertaking in this activity to be called 'dadirri'.

Instead, children are guided through an activity focused on deep listening as an example of a way to notice and connect with the world around them in a meaningful way.

If you'd like to use the specific practice of *dadirri*, permission can be sought from [Ngangiwumirr](#) educator Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann. Your school may also wish to make a donation to the Miriam Rose Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation working to empower Indigenous youth through education, art, culture and opportunity in the Daly River region.

For more information, you can read about *dadirri* in this [article](#) (1,491 words, 6-minute read), access the [Miriam Rose Foundation](#) website, and watch the brief video, [Dadirri](#) (03:42).

## Which words?

You can access our [Language and Terminology Toolkit](#) for any terms you feel unsure about.

## Glossary

**Country:** the lands where First Nations communities have always lived and belonged to. It's also a belief system, a relationship with all living and non-living things which includes everything within that landscape: rocks, trees, waterways, sky, animals, plants, medicines, sacred sites, all people, ancestral spirits and past, present and future community connections. Country sustains First Nations Peoples and must be respected and cared for by every generation that is and will be.

## Activity materials

You'll need:

- a shared screen to present an online map to the class
- a copy of *Country* by Aunty Fay Muir and Sue Lawson
- magnifying glasses
- a copy of the 'What do you notice?' sign for each group table
- a copy of the 'Noticing nature' teacher resource
- objects collected from nature (leaves, etc.)
- strips of brown paper or card, sticky tape and/or glue.

## Activities



### Learning about Country

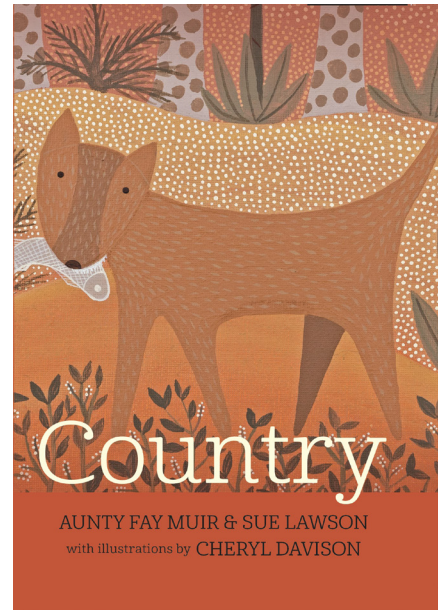
#### Read *Country* by Aunty Fay Muir and Sue Lawson

Before reading the picture book, look at the front cover together and ask the children what they think the book is going to be about, and if they already know anything about what, or *who*, **Country** is.

Share the picture book *Country* with the group, talking about Cheryl Davison's illustrations and Muir's and Lawson's text as you go, and allowing children to share their connections to and reflections on the story as you read.

After reading ask the children:

- What did you notice in the book?
- Was there anything new that you saw or learnt?
- Do you have any questions or are you wondering about anything after reading the book?



### Resources for further learning

To support your teaching, watch Aunty Fay Muir and Sue Lawson talk to the Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA) about their picture book and what Country means to them:

- [An introduction to Country for students and teachers](#) (02:16)
- [Country as a special place, and how it makes us feel](#) (04:54)



### Explore the AIATSIS Map

Use the AIATSIS [Map of Indigenous Australia](#) to explore and explain the diversity of First Nations Countries around Australia.

Aunty Fay Muir, one of the authors of the picture book, is from [Boon Wurrung](#) and [Wamba Wamba](#) Countries in Victoria. Find these two Countries on the AIATSIS Map.

Then look for the Country or Countries that the preschool/site is located on, identifying it by name, e.g. "Our preschool is on Kurna Country".

Ask the children to brainstorm the different plants and animals that live on the Country the preschool is located on – lands, skies and waterways. You may like to draw or list these for display in the room.



### Experience Country around us

Take the children outside to see if they can notice any of the plants or animals they came up with in the brainstorm.

Then ask them each to collect one thing from the natural environment to bring into the classroom. Remind them that as Aunty Fay Muir teaches us, Country is all living and non-living natural things. Because of this, everything we choose to bring inside is still Country. We should tread carefully and choose items that are already on the ground.

Gather all the items together to be used in the next activity.

## Looking carefully at Country

### Play 'What do you notice?'

Set up a hands-on provocation in the classroom using the natural objects collected during the previous activity, and some magnifying glasses. Print the provided sign for the students' tables.

Encourage children to use the magnifying glasses to view the objects in more detail and use descriptive language to identify the texture, shape, size, width, length, thickness and scent of each.



### Play 'Noticing nature'

To play the game, 'Noticing nature', take children outside to a space they can move around in freely. If it's a large area, talk about where the boundaries are for this activity, so no-one goes out of sight during the game.

Explain how the game's played:

1. Call out a body part and colour, e.g. "Put your hand on something yellow", then the children look for something of that colour in the outside area to put their hand on.
2. Once all the children have found something, choose one or two children to share with the group what they found that was the colour called out.
3. Ask the children to describe the texture, shape, size, width, length, thickness and scent of it, just as they did for the 'What do you notice?' activity in the classroom.

Use the provided teacher resource for 'Noticing nature' game as a prompt if needed.

## Listening carefully on Country

### Listen and connect

Find a space outside where children can sit or lie comfortably with their eyes closed.

When they're settled and comfortable ask the children to try to notice all the sounds they can hear around them, especially sounds in nature, such as different bird calls, leaves rustling on trees, footsteps of other people moving around. etc.

After a few moments ask the children to open their eyes and come together as a group to talk about what they heard. Talk with the children about the importance of Country to First Nations Peoples and the ways that First Nations people listen to and care for Country.

Ask the children:

- Why do we think listening to Country is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- What can we learn from listening to Country today?

## Moving carefully like Country

### Sing and dance with Sharron mirli Bell

Watch the video from [Play School Show Time](#) showing [Wiradjuri Gamilaraay](#) woman Sharron mirii Bell sharing her own songs 'Let Us Pay Respects' and 'Stomp'. Encourage the children to join in with the songs and actions as they watch.

After watching the video, ask the children if any of Aunty Sharron's actions or movements reminded them of anything we may find on Country.



### Create movements inspired by Country

Take the children outside to a space where they can freely move around.

Gather together to begin and ask the children to carefully observe the space they're in, taking some time to notice any plants or animals they can see or hear. Encourage them to notice any ways the plants or animals are moving.

Choose one child at a time to create some movement based on something they've observed, for example, a bird hopping around the ground, leaves moving in the wind, etc. They may also like to add in some movements inspired by Aunty Sharron in the video.

This activity offers the opportunity to teach about acknowledging sources. Let them know that Aunty Sharron's songs and dances are special to her and that she was generous to share them with everyone. Encourage the children to thank her for this if she inspired their movements. You may like to ask all the children to say who or what has been their inspiration.

The children could copy each other's moves or try to guess what each child is moving like.

### Taking care of Country



#### Revisit *Country* by Aunty Fay Muir and Sue Lawson

Share the picture book with the children again, allowing them to make any connections to the experiences they've been having when looking, listening and moving on Country.

Pause at the last page, which reads "When we care for Country, Country is strong and healthy. Then we are strong and healthy too." (Muir, Lawson and Davison 2024). Ask the children what they think this means and if they know any ways that we can all care for Country.

This may also be a good time to remind children of the Country the preschool is on, as you learnt in the first activity.



#### Make a headband

For the headbands you'll need the found objects gathered in the first activity (plus any others you or the children have collected) and strips of brown paper.

Children glue or tape the objects on to the headbands, then can wear these as a way of sharing what they've learnt, and telling others why Country is so special and how we can all help take care of it.

This is also an opportunity to begin to introduce the concept of sustainability to the children, as it relates to First Nations Peoples and their reciprocal relationship with Country. Discuss with children that First Nations people take only what they need from Country and are mindful of leaving enough for next time, to ensure the environment stays balanced and healthy.

When the headbands are finished gather the children as a group (outside if you wish) and ask:

- What do our headbands help us to remember?
- What can our headbands teach others?





# What do you notice?



# Noticing nature



## Instructions for the game:

- Call out a body part and colour.

*Example:* Put your **hand** on something **yellow**.

- The children look for something of that colour in the outside area to put their hand on.
- Once all the children have found something, choose one or two children to share what they found, using the questions provided.

## Questions

What did you find?

How does it feel? What is the texture?

What shape is it?

What height/width/length/thickness is it?

How does it smell? What is its scent?

What else do you notice about it?

# Country

## EARLY YEARS (AGES 3–5)

### Australians Together Learning Framework™

Our resources follow a framework of 5 Key Ideas that are designed to shape a new narrative for all Australians. Each Key Idea underpins the content and activities in its section to take students on a transformational learning journey. You can download the framework from our [Curriculum Resources page](#).



#### **The Wound**

Injustice from the impact of colonisation



#### **Our History**

A past that shapes our story as a nation



#### **Why Me?**

What's it got to do with me?



#### **Our Cultures**

Everyone has culture. Know about your culture and value the cultures of others



#### **My Response**

Steps we can take to build a brighter future

### Alignment to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF v2.0)

#### **Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity**

- 1.2 Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and agency
- 1.3 Children develop knowledgeable confident self-identities, and a positive sense of self-worth
- 1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

#### **Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world**

- 2.1 Children develop a sense of connectedness to groups and communities and an understanding of their reciprocal rights and responsibilities as active and informed citizens
- 2.4 Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

#### **Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**

- 3.1 Children become strong in their social, emotional and mental wellbeing
- 3.2 Children become strong in their physical learning and mental wellbeing

#### **Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners**

- 4.1 Children develop a growth mindset and learning dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- 4.2 Children develop a range of learning and thinking skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- 4.3 Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another

## Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- 5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes
  - 5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
  - 5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
  - 5.5 Children use digital technologies and media to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking
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## References

- Muir F, Lawson S and Davison C (2024) *Country*, © Wild Dog Books, accessed 15 October 2024. Reproduced with permission.
- Muir F and Lawson S (2018) *Nganga: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander words and phrases*, Walker Books website, accessed 15 October 2024. Reproduced with permission.

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*Boy wearing crown made of natural materials*, Elena Chevalier/Shutterstock.com

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