

Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad
Independent/Curriculum Project
Submitted by Andre' Avedisian, October 9,2006
June 13-July15,2006, Seminar
Australia: An Ancient, Delicate and Unique Environment

I. Title: The Universality of Origination Dreamtime Myths of the Australian Aboriginals.

II. Grade level: Tenth and twelfth.

III. Background Notes/Personal Narrative:

Australian poet Dorothea Mackellar wrote, "I love a sunburnt country, A land of sweeping plains, Of ragged mountain ranges, Of droughts and flooding rains". I found my Australian experience to be a unique and singular moment in my traveling education. The title of the seminar is "Australia: An Ancient Delicate and Unique Environment," and, yes, the environment is delicate, but ironically the people are hearty, warm, gregarious and anything but delicate.

Our group traveled to many varied and unique locations; cities like Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Darwin and Cairns captured our urban imaginations. We visited galleries; museums; zoos with wondrous animals; schools; universities; environmental centers; Sydney Harbour Bridge and Opera House; and a plethora of other brilliant locations. We also journeyed to many spectacular locations of natural wonder: The Great Barrier Reef; Kakadu National Park; Royal National Park; the 10,000,000 year old rain forest at Mossman Gorge, and many other natural settings. However, the place that had the most profound effect on me was the ancient monolith, Uluru, at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in the Outback of Australia.

In *The Book of Kerith* George Moore writes, "A man travels the world over in search of what he needs and returns home to find it." This inspiring moment at Uluru was an epiphany which crystallized my curriculum project. Seeing two sunsets and one sunrise at Uluru was the experience of a lifetime. The sacred aboriginal site was a beautiful example of nature's grandeur. The majestic beauty of Australia was evident to me in the quiet sunrise of July 4th. Three colleagues and I stood peacefully at sunrise, watching the sacred monolith change color as the sun rose in the sky. We stood in rapture and silent awe as this rare moment revealed itself to us. Without exaggeration, it was a transcendent moment in my adventure down under. I felt, in some small way, connected to the spirit of the place. In my seminar proposal I wrote about the unique spirit of a place, the "genius loci". The Australian rock band, Goanna, writes in the liner notes of its cd *Spirit of the Place*, "...in the heart of the vast Australian desert...under a canopy of stars with that great, sacred weathered stone silhouetted by a full moon rising ,(they) were moved by the Aboriginal." During the Uluru sunrise, I realized my project. I knew it would be about the Aboriginal experience and the use of folktales and myths to explain natural phenomena, societal behavior, the animal world: an ethos for living. Part of my original plan was to use film and cinema in my project, but I now I felt compelled to do something more creative and hands on. Being an American I feel a strong affinity for the plight of the Aboriginal people because of parallel treatment of Native Americans at the

hands of the white settlers in the United States.

We went in future days to visit other sacred Aboriginal locations such as Kata Tjuta and to the wall paintings of Kakadu National Park.

IV. Curriculum Unit/Project Summary:

My lesson will show connections between the origination myths of the ancient Greeks and the Aboriginals. Our first unit will focus on ancient myths in classical literature: *The Story of Cronus; The Story of Phaethon; The Story of Prometheus; The Story of Pandora's Box, et. al.* I feel it is essential for students to be able to shift from the particular to the universal and back again. Keeping this in mind, at the completion of this unit I will transition into my Australian experience. Using many varied digital photo images of my trip in conjunction with Australian music, both contemporary and aboriginal, I will introduce a history of Australia and will utilize specific items which constitute my "trunk" of goods to gain student interest and attempt to entertain and educate.

I have two sources of Aboriginal myths. After we read some representative Aboriginal myths as a class, each student will be assigned a myth through a blind drawing; I have chosen and duplicated 30 or so myths. Students will pick a myth; read it and prepare an analysis of the myth. They might compare it to other myths or folktales which they have encountered from global cultures. Comparison with classical myths will be encouraged. Each student will be required to read his or her chosen myth aloud. Following are examples of aboriginal myths contained in A.W. Reed's *Aboriginal Fables and Legendary Tales: The Cannibal Woman; The Frog, the Wallaby and the Dugong; The Rainbow Snake; and How the Porcupine Got His Spines, et. al.*

After each reading we will discuss the students' interpretations and how the myths compare with other Aboriginal myths as well as classical and modern myths. Once I have tested on assigned readings, each student will be assigned the writing of their own origination or explanation myth. Students will be encouraged to be creative and imaginative in their compositions; representative visual arts will be great companion pieces for the writings. The student-generated original stories will be read in class.

V. Objective:

The objective of my unit lesson is to broaden the knowledge and appreciation of the culture of Australia through the study of traditional Aboriginal folktales and myths.

VI. Materials:

A. *Play and Enjoy the Didjeridu of the Australian Aboriginal: A Newcomers Guide* by Peter Kaye .

B. *Aboriginal Fables and Legendary Tales* by A.W. Reed; 1965; published by New Holland, Sydney, AU.

C. *Legendary Tales of the Australian Aboriginals* by David Unaipon; edited and introduced by Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker; 2001; published by The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, AU.

D. Maruku Arts: Aboriginal Handcrafts from the Central and Western Desert.

VII. Additional Resources:

Trunks containing Australian clothing; maps; picture books; a didgeridu; Tjutinyapa and Kantitjara (clubs and chisels); a decorative boomerang; Aboriginal wall hangings; recipes for such dishes as pumpkin soup and Lamingtons.

VIII. Secondary Curriculum Unit:

In my Film Appreciation 12 course I will use all introductory information, notes, additional resources, and materials mentioned above to create a mini-Australian film unit. I will screen *Quigley Down Under*, a western filmed in Australia and directed by Australian, Simon Wincer. We will also view the Australian film, *Rabbit Proof Fence*.

IX. Assessment:

A. Student assessment will occur through discussions; quizzes; tests; original writings; oral presentations; artwork; and student analysis of Aboriginal writings, et. al.

B. Not only will I be making presentations to my classes, but also to my Board of Education; the local chapter of Rotary International and at my school's Open House.