



FIRST PEOPLES



The **Many Nations** section of the *First Peoples* exhibition showcases the diverse cultures of First Peoples across Australia. There are five cases that display objects that have been used in daily life for thousands of years and illustrate the vibrant living culture of the First Peoples of Australia.

We can learn a lot about the First Peoples by looking at these objects and thinking about their meaning and significance. You will see examples of objects that have been made recently and others that might be hundreds of years old.

Working Country contains objects that were used in hunting, agriculture, aquaculture and architecture, and includes objects that use introduced materials.

Celebrating Culture contains objects that are used in ceremony and cultural practice. They reflect intricate use of feathers and other natural products including introduced species such as rabbit

Marking Identity contains shields from across Australia reflecting unique designs of different language groups from across Australia

Animal Creations contains artworks that reflect First Peoples connection to the natural world and their relationship with animals both as totems and as living beings.

Keeping Places contains an extraordinary range of containers made from many different materials. Specialist containers for honey or ochre can be found alongside woven baskets

The following activities will help you to identify the differences in cultural representation across Australia and to think more deeply about what we can learn from the First Peoples of Australia. –

The objects in these cases are all available on Collections Online
Click the item number to see it on collections online or

<https://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/search?displaylocation=bunjilaka>

Working Country

The objects in the Working Country case come from all over Australia. They relate directly to the language, culture and identity of the people of the area where they were made. Each object serves a particular purpose. Study the object carefully.

- **What is it made from?**
- **Where does it come from?**
- **What was it used for?**
- **Why is it an important item for that area?**
- **What does it make you wonder?**



Victoria

Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta – Kerang

Fire Utensil , clay balls

When heated work like an oven on which food can be placed and cooked.

Made in 2012. Maker: Esther Kirby. [Item X105098](#)

Explain your thinking



Queensland–North

Language group not recorded

Spear, *Ungine*

A multi barbed spear with rows of echidna quills embedded into resin and painted with natural pigments. Extremely rare as most spears of this type in Northern Queensland use stingray barbs. Made in 1910. Maker not recorded. [Item X10109](#)

Explain your thinking

Northern Territory

Djupa – Caledon Bay

Toy fly whisk, *Wuritj wuritj*

Made for children in the exact same way as made for adults to wave flies away.

Emu feathers, bees wax and wood. Made in 1942. Maker not recorded. [Item DT 1078](#)

Explain your thinking



Western Australia

Pintupi – Desert Central

Spearthrower, *Ilanguro*

Made from wax/resin, pigment, quartzite stone, acacia wood, spinifex, sinew.

Different types used across Australia to help spears be thrown faster and further. Made in 1963. Maker not recorded. [Item DT 4568](#)

Explain your thinking

South Australia

Nawu – Port Lincoln

Fish Hook

Made from edge of bivalve shell and sinew

Fishing in rivers and oceans is an important cultural activity practiced by the Nawu and hundreds of other coastal communities across Australia. Made in 1900. Maker not recorded. [Item X9240](#)

Explain your thinking



New South Wales

Barkindji/ Paroo – Darling River

Digging implement, *Yamma*

Made from wood-not specified

This shovel has a deep digging end and the handle tapers from the outside of the shovel to a pointed end.

Made in 1860. Made by “King Billy”– non Indigenous name.

[Item X94623](#)

Explain your thinking

Celebrating Culture

The objects in the Celebrating Culture case come from all over Australia. They relate directly to the language, culture and identity of the people of the area where they were made. Each object serves a particular purpose. Study the object carefully.

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Northern Territory

Wangurri – Eastern Arnhem Land

Arm ornament, *Wurrwa*

Nnanybak is a generic name for armbands that are made from a single length of string wound around a section of cane.

This armband was made for a child and made from red-coloured lorikeet feathers and string fibres from Kurrajong bark.

Made in 1936. Maker not recorded.

[Item DT 8383](#)

Explain your thinking



Victoria

Wurundjeri – Melbourne

Hat

Akubra hat made from rabbit fur and iconic Australian design. Symbols include geometric circles, an X-ray snake and two witchetty grubs. Made in 1990s.

Maker: Darlene Nichols. [Item X 88575](#)

Explain your thinking



Queensland

Meriam – Palm Island

Headdress, *Dari* or *Dhoeri*

Headdress made of feathers attached to a frame of coloured fibre. Dhari headdress very rare piece and today the making has re-emerged as an iconic symbol and one of the motifs on the Torres Strait Island Flag. Made between 1920-1930.

Maker not recorded. [Item X 104884](#)

Explain your thinking



Western Australia – Kimberley

Bardi – Broome

Neck ornament, *Riji*

Pearl shell and human hair string. Inside shell is incised with concentric geometric zig zig patterning. Symbolises shadows of storms clouds and lightning. Made in 1920. Maker not recorded.

[Item X 98257](#)

Explain your thinking



South Australia

Ngarrindjeri – Kingston

Craft piece

Feather flowers made with guinea fowl feathers. Bunches of 9 flowers with 3 straight feathers behind. Centre of the flowers contain gold coloured material. Flowers are bound with tape and wire. Made in 1930. Maker: Letty Nicholls.

[Item X 101610](#)

Explain your thinking



Tasmania – Bass Strait Islands

Cape Barren Island

Neck ornament

Single strand shell necklace made of alternate bands of green pearly coloured marines and brown coloured dried meses drilled and threaded onto twine. Made in 1977. Maker: Sarah R. Mansell.

[Item X 94513](#)

Explain your thinking

Marking Identity

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Victoria

Yarra River

Parrying shield, *Drunmung*

Ironbark was the wood of preference but box gum was most commonly used. Aboriginal men from south-eastern groups used parrying shields during single, close combat to ward off heavy blows from clubs and throwing sticks. This drunmung features intricate crosshatching, a design frequently found on Aboriginal material culture, including on possum-skin cloaks. Made in 1880s, maker not recorded. [Item X1851](#)

Explain your thinking

New South Wales, Darling River

Barkindji

Broad shield, *Yangku*

Cut from solid timber. Coated in red ochre with the incisions filled with white pipeclay. Broad yangku (shields) were used in group fights to deflect spears; they are wider and lighter than the parrying yangku used in one-on-one combat. Made around 1890. Maker not recorded. [Item X9107](#)

Explain your thinking

Northern Territory

Alice Springs

Shield, *Alkwerte*

An oval shield made from softwood (red bean tree) painted with natural pigments. Used to deflect spears or blows from boomerangs in conflict situations. The alkwerte is painted with designs representing the totemic ancestors. The shields are also used in revealing details of the ancestors to young men in ceremony and displayed during the public stages of initiation. Made in 1950. Maker unknown. [Item X48157](#)

Explain your thinking



Western Australia, Kimberley

Lombadina

Shield, *Marrga*

Elongated oval-shaped shield; plano-convex in cross section. Both ends of shield are curved upwards. Posterior surface is decorated with bands of alternate red ochre and finely fluted section in natural wood. Made in 1969. Maker Sandy Paddy.

[Item X98302](#)

Explain your thinking



South Australia, Flinders Ranges

Depot Springs

Shield

Small-oval shaped wooden shield with truncated ends. Posterior side decorated with pokerwork design of two leaf shaped motifs. Anterior surface is decorated with ducks around the edge and in the centre snakes, lizards, scorpion and spider. Made in 1938. Maker not recorded. [Item X94907](#)

Explain your thinking



Queensland, Rainforest

Cardwell

Shield, *Balan begin*

Made from the buttress roots of the large milkwood trees of the north Queensland rainforests. Background of the outer surface painted with yellow ochre and features an abstract geometric pattern. The excellent condition of the surface suggests it was not used in battle. Made 1840-1890, maker unknown. [Item X5802](#)

Explain your thinking

Animal Creations

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Western Australia, Central Desert

Ngaanyatjarra – Blackstone

Rabbit, *Rapita* or *Pinytjatanpa*

Blackstone, Central Desert.

Carved wooden rabbit decorated with poker-work design.

Maker: Mrs Benson, 1990

[Item 88292](#)

Explain your thinking



Victoria

Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta – Kerang

Carved Emu Egg

Emu egg carving by Esther Kirby, 2012.

[Item 104850](#)

Explain your thinking



Tasmania

Trawlwoolway – Gravelly Beach

Tasmanian Devil, *Purinina*

Sculpture of an animal form, Tasmanian Devil, made from kelp by Vicki West, 2013. [Item 105152](#)

Explain your thinking



South Australia

Pitjantjatjara – Ernabella

Carving, *Liru*

Wood carving of a poisonous snake. [Item 88195](#)

Explain your thinking



Northern Territory, Tiwi Islands

Tiwi – Bathurst Island

Carving, *Kipiwuru*

Animal figure in the shape of a bird made from hardwood and natural pigments. Made by Stanislaus Puruntatameri, 1979. [Item 83084](#)

Explain your thinking



Queensland

Lardil – Mornington Island

Carving, *Dilmirrur*

A figure carved in the shape of a dugong from hardwood.
Made in 1977. [Item: 97003](#)

Explain your thinking

Keeping Places

The objects in the Keeping Places case come from all over Australia. They relate directly to the language, culture and identity of the people of the area where they were made. Each object serves a particular purpose. Study the object carefully

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Victoria

Yarra – Melbourne

Water scoop, *No-bintarno*

Made from the gnarl of a gum tree, hollowed out by gouging and scraping. Also used to prepare beverages from the nectar of honeysuckle and other plants. Made around 1850s. Maker unknown. [Item X1561](#)

Explain your thinking

Queensland, Rainforest

Language group not recorded

Basket, *Jawun*

Made of lawyer cane decorated with natural pigments. Historically bicornual baskets were crafted by both men and women and the distinctive shape achieved using a twining technique. Made around 1890s. Maker unknown. [Item X5988](#)

Explain your thinking

Northern Territory, Eastern Arnhem Land

Djambarrpuyngu

Childs basket, *Bathi wakkal'poi*

Made of pandanus with feathers and cotton cloth attached. This basket was made for a child, presumably for a young boy, as it is an imitation of a senior man's ceremonial basket. Made in 1942. Maker unknown. [Item DT1074](#)

Explain your thinking

Western Australia, Kimberley

Kalumburu Mission

Basket, *Garagi*

Cylinder-shaped honey/water carrier with open top. The main body is made of bark held together with string and sealed with beeswax. Ochre decorates the outside. Made in 1977. Maker unknown. [Item X97977](#)

Explain your thinking



South Australia

Ngarrindjeri – Lake Alexandrina

Basket, *Koyi*

Made from rushes. The handle contains a sliding lid. Ngarrindjeri women and children have always harvested the reeds on their traditional lands from the edges of Lake Alexandrina. The women have passed the knowledge of basket making from generation to generation and continue to use the same techniques. Made around 1890. Maker unknown. [Item x15885](#)

Explain your thinking



New South Wales

Wagga Wagga

Sister Basket

Made from dyed and natural raffia with a core made from recycled paper cord. The two sides are stitched together to form a circular basket body with a handle attached on opposite sides. Made in 2011. Maker: Mrs Kath Withers. [Item X104845](#)

Explain your thinking

Draw your favourite objects from each case here: