The Dreamtime - Aboriginal Australia

The Aborigines - or the Indigenous Australians - are the native Australians. They make up about 2, 5% of the population (439.704) today, but it is estimated that, at the time of the white man's arrival in Australia, 350.000 to one million Aboriginal people lived here. They were divided into numerous communities and societies and encompassed more than 700 different languages. Today only about 200 of these remains and some of these languages are almost extinct and all but 20 are highly endangered.



Australian Aboriginal flag

History

When the white settlers arrived they brought with them an invisible enemy to the native people - smallpox. Within the first year about half of the native population had died due to this disease. Furthermore the settlers wanted their land, so they drove them away from the best places to live and some settlers were also very violent towards the aboriginals. The consequence was that from1788 to 1900, 90% of the native Australians had died. The settlers didn't think they should have the same rights to the land as them, even though they came first. Today it is scientifically proved they have been in Australia for at least 40.000 years. In their mind, however, they have been here since time began; since the Dreamtime.



The Dreamtime- the sacred world

The Dreamtime is, according to Aboriginal belief, the time where the creative ancestors created the earth and everything on it. When the ancestor beings had created everything, they sank into the earth again. Some of them became trees, rocks or part of the landscape. These places are sacred. Today the Aboriginal people enact the events from the Dreamtime in religious ceremonies and dancing. This is called 'Dreaming'.

Task

Many of the dreamtime stories try to explain why the land or the animals look in a certain way. Write a short story on how the kangaroo got its pouch.

The Physical World

The Aboriginal people have a different view on the world than most Europeans and other westerners. Here are some quotations from their internet site www.aboriginalaustralia.com :

'We don't own the land, the land owns us'
'The Land is my mother, my mother is the land'
'Land is the starting point to where it all began. It is like picking up a piece of dirt and saying this is where I started and this is where I will go'
'The land is our food, our culture, our spirit and identity'
'We don't have boundaries like fences, as farmers do. We have spiritual connections'

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Task
Describe the relationship the Aboriginal people have to the land and compare to the typical western way to think of the land and nature.

The Human World
The Aboriginal people are scattered throughout Australia. They belong to different clan, and most clans have their own language. There is great diversity among the Aboriginal people. Some are university professors; others live in the Australian outback. But they all have a special connection to the land and aboriginal culture.



Aboriginal art
Aboriginal art is very famous and very easy to recognize. You can divide it into two types: Non-figurative art and figurative art. You will find rock paintings at sacred places, telling stories from the Dreamtime. Traditional art is also seen as decorations on tool, like a boomerang, or as body paintings for religious ceremonies.



Aboriginal life today
Today many Aboriginal people are westernised, and live in the cities. Some are still living in a more traditional way? but not many. Aboriginal life today is not always easy. They are facing severe problems like: Poverty, poor education, alcohol- and drug abuse, racial discrimination, difficulties in getting medical help in rural areas, crime etc. Aboriginal people are e.g. 11times more likely to go to prison than other Australians and they live in average 17 years less.

Task
What could the Australian government do to help the Aboriginal people?

Name some other places in the world where native people have poorer living conditions than the rest of the population. Why is that so?



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