

THE FIRST INVENTORS



EPISODE 3 A CONNECTED CONTINENT

STORY 5

TOTEMS

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First Nations people of Australia's Kinship systems ensure natural resources are preserved and shared sustainably. Throughout human history there have been many societies that have failed because resources were over exploited.

To preserve natural resources First Peoples developed another level of Kinship, the Totem system. Every plant and animal are accounted for, ensuring sustainability as individuals take on responsibility to protect them. Traditional Owner Kenneth McLean shares a ceremonial ground with archaeologists on Jigurrurru (Lizard Island). He explains that this sacred place is where young men go to learn how to hunt and respect the island's animals and environment. By doing so, they help preserve the knowledge of this sacred place.

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Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions

- Do you know what a Totem is?
- Do you have a Totem in your culture?
- How do First Nations people care for their Totems?

Post Viewing Discussion Questions

- Share your thoughts on the Totem system of First Nations people and its role in sustainability.
- Do you know the local First Nations people Totems?

Activity Local First Nations Kinship and Totem systems

Respecting and learning the local First Nations Kinship and Totem systems is important for your students. Invite a local First Nations Elder or respected community member in to your class to share about their Moieties, Totems, and Skin Names. Ask your guest speaker to:

1. Share how they protect, connect and care for their Totem as well as the environment they live in, and
2. What role your students play too in protecting, connecting and caring for their Totem as well as the environment they live in.

If you can't get a guest speaker, have your students research the Totem of your local First Nations group themselves and learn as much information as possible to ensure their survival.

Knowledge is to be shared. So, create a way to inform your community of the local First Nations Totem and how we can all play a role in ensuring sustainability of this natural resource for future generations.

Extension Activity Personal commitment through Art

Totems are usually assigned and given to a First Nations people by an Elder or family member. The education and connection to their Totem begins in that moment.

Discuss in a yarning circle the animals and plants your students individually feel a deep connection to, what they know about them, and if they feel a responsibility to ensure that animal or plant is protected and so is their environment.

Have students create a piece of art using their chosen medium to express their connection to an animal or plant that they are committed to learning more about protecting, respecting and ensuring their environment is also protected for future generations. Display their art work, so others can learn about the role we all play in sustainability of our natural resources.

For Deeper Discussion Or Debate

Why is it important to capture and preserve culturally significant information?

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Teacher Note

Connecting and building long term relationships to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, respected community members and families, is vital in connecting your students to other voices, to lived experiences and to ancient knowledge systems.

Further Information

University of Sydney

[Totems](https://www.sydney.edu.au/about-us/vision-and-values/our-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-community/kinship-module/learning-module/totems.html)

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Wingaru

[Traditional Sustainability Practices](https://www.wingaru.com.au/blog/traditional-sustainability-practices)

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