

SandSong: Stories from the Great Sandy Desert: Through the Lens of Aotearoa Discussion Starters



1. Examine the concepts listed below and discuss how they are different; who they serve; and whether or how they might come into conflict with each other.

Provide examples from New Zealand of the following.

- Land custodianship – caring for Land, knowing the Land, sustaining the Land's environment.
- Land ownership – capital value, exploitation for profit, ownership, title.
- Sovereignty – authority, governance, and power over a land with (or without) borders.

2. **Think about the act of displacement.**

How would it feel to be forced off the Land that connects you to your family, your ancestors, your sustenance, your knowledge systems?

What are some differences or similarities to Māori in New Zealand?

3. **Think about the practice of exploitation.**

What would it feel like to be consulted for your expert knowledge and highly skilled capacities, while being abused for your race?

How would it feel to be punished for simply existing, or to be captured and sold for money?

Does this occur in New Zealand and what factors contribute to this situation?

PRE- AND POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

Below are some guiding questions and discussion points for teachers to explore with their students either before or after the performance. As well as discussion and written responses, students could explore creative responses as well, such as a visual art piece, poem or other creative writing response.

1. Refer to the list of links and further reading on page 9 and 22 of *SandSong's* Study Guide.
2. Consider the discussion starters on pages 13 and 16 either as a class or in small focus groups. Encourage students to scope a range of perspectives. These might emerge as conversations develop.

3. Discuss how the colonial history of the Kimberley and Great Sandy Desert areas of WA are similar and/or uniquely different from the settler history in other parts of Australia, in terms of Government policy and development of industries, as well as the relationships between Indigenous people and European settlers.

4. Beyond the critical need of water for survival, what role does this element of nature play in the spiritual connection of the people of the Kimberley with their cultural inheritance and knowledge systems?

5. Against the backdrop of Western capitalism, and changing levels of awareness and respect for First Nations knowledge, cultures and communities, what are some of the actions and strategies Indigenous people have had to initiate to survive, and what can non-Indigenous people learn from this?

6. Native title is the formal recognition by Australian law of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's traditional rights and interests in land and waters held under traditional law and custom. Research some of the key Native Title legislative events such as the Native Title Act (1993) after the Mabo decision in the High Court in 1992, and/or Wik (1996), and discuss the challenges that First Nations people encounter as they bring their cases to court.

IN RELATION TO SANDSONG:

7. How can Indigenous dance theatre serve as a powerful form of storytelling? Is human movement as 'language' sometimes more powerful when compared to written or spoken text? If so, why?

8. How do the dance, design and sound/music elements of *SandSong* complement each other?

9. Were there any specific sections of *SandSong* that made a particular impact on your experience of the work, stimulating a response that you weren't expecting?

10. Looking at the design features (set, costume, lighting) of *SandSong*. Were there any specific design features that you found particularly interesting, surprising and/or effective? How does this design amplify the strength of the work and/or how does it enrich the story being told?

11. How does the technical skill of the dancer support the choreography? What are some of the physical skills and attributes that dancers need to bring to the choreography?

12. How do the creative and interpretative skills of the dancer support the choreography? Do you notice anything about the dancers' focus, their capacity for adding texture to movement, and are you aware of their emotional input to the performance?

DISCUSSION STARTERS

In the context of rule by government, what do we mean by 'policy'?

What is its purpose, how is it developed, communicated, and evaluated – and who is it meant to serve?

Compare this to a current New Zealand policy and explain the factors that contribute to indigenous Māori of New Zealand?

Constitutional recognition of First Nations Australians has not been achieved despite decades of discussion, consultation and advocacy.

What are the challenges in changing the constitution?

We can't predict the future, but we can speculate.

What might constitutional recognition for Australia's First Nation people look like?

What kind of change might it bring?

What might be some legacy issues in relation to previous legislation like the White Australia Policy, the WA Aborigines Act of 1905, and the raft of 'protection' policies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Acknowledgments

Wiki Papa

SandSong: Stories from the Great Sandy Desert: Through the Lens of Aotearoa

Alongside Bangarra Dance Theatre's extensive Study Guide for schools, this education pack offers a targeted lens on the Indigenous history, dance, storytelling, and cultural practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Māori & Land: *"Not One More Acre"* – Dame Whina Cooper



Dame Whina Cooper



Land March Approaching Auckland

Māori have deep connections to the land, whenua, particularly with turangawaewae, meaning the place you are rooted in, your place of standing and where you feel most connected. When Europeans came to Aotearoa, they did not see the spiritual and cultural value of the land but the financial gains. Land was brought, confiscated, stolen, and sold right under Māori, tearing apart families, communities and severing deep-rooted connections with land. After Cook's first landing in Aotearoa in 1769, Māori were stripped from 95% of their land.

Ever since, Māori have been forced to leave their homes and adjust to the Pākehā way of life. There have been some triumphs, including engaging in successful trade with Pākehā and forming foundational documents that aim to protect Māori rights and land. The most prominent of these documents is Te Tiriti o Waitangi, The Treaty of Waitangi. However, throughout history there has been continual loss of Māori land and failure from the government to honour those documents. Although Māori have a strong history of activism, the 1970s saw a powerful revolution of Māori political activation in Aotearoa.

Formed in the early 70s, the major Māori activist group Nga Tamatoa was a student led movement that sought protection for Indigenous rights, combated racial discrimination and campaigned for prolific protest movements such as the Māori Language Petition (1972) and the Māori Land March (1975).

On 6 February 1974 Waitangi Day was officially recognised as a public holiday and renamed New Zealand Day. This sparked outrage from Māori as the Treaty of Waitangi was still largely ignored by government, and history could not be fixed by tying a nice 'public holiday bow' on it. The Māori Land March in 1975, led by Dame Whina Cooper, protested the ongoing loss of Māori land. The 100-km walk began in Te Hāpua in the far north and ended at Parliament in Wellington with 5000 protesters handing over a petition that had garnered over 60,000 signatures.

In 1975 the Waitangi Tribunal was established with aims to recommend and support claims lodged by Māori relating to Crown actions which breach the Treaty of Waitangi. Lodged disputes are still being resolved to this day.

Māori & Performing Arts



Maranga Mai performing at The Beehive, 1980

Alongside this political upsurging, the 70s saw the rise of Māori theatre, much of which was politically rooted and tackled issues around Māori land rights. The grassroots Māori theatre company, Maranga Mai, launched in 1979.

The company toured work across the country, including performing at The Beehive.

Their work directly contradicted a wider belief amongst Europeans that Māori-Pākehā race relations were fair.

Māori have a deep connection with storytelling and performing arts that predates European colonization and even Māori's own voyage to Aotearoa across the Pacific Ocean. Before the Māori language was written down, stories were passed from generation to generation through spoken word, music and dance.

Kia kōrero te katoa o te tinana – The whole body should speak

When Aotearoa was colonised, there was an attempt by Christian missionaries to stop Māori practicing sacred chants, waiata and dance. But Māori performing arts persevered and kapa haka is revered around the world.

Kapa Haka: did you know?

Kapa means to form a line

Haka means to dance

One of the oldest and most famous dances in Māori culture is the haka. Historically the haka is a war dance, a challenge to opponents before battle but it is also performed as a welcome to guests and visiting tribes. The haka represents unity and strength and can be performed by both men and women.

Discussion Time

You may have seen the All Blacks perform the haka on television, you may even be learning it in school.

What body parts are used throughout the haka?

What do you think each of those actions mean?



Contemporary Dance & Dance Groups in New Zealand



BLACK GRACE - NEIL IEREMIA

In the 1980s Stephen Bradshaw formed two major dance companies signaling the development of Māori contemporary dance. Te Kaninaki O Te Rangatahi (1984) was a multimedia troupe for Māori men and women and following this was the company Taiao.

Throughout the 90s and early 2000s dancers and choreographers like Merenia Gray, Jack Gray, Taiaroa Royal and Taane Mete paved the way for Māori dancers in the mainstream.

Today we have many notable nationally and internationally touring Māori contemporary dance groups such as Atamira Dance Company (2000), Ōkāreka Dance Company (2007) and Pacific dance company Black Grace (1995).

First People



Southern Cross

It is estimated that New Zealand was first discovered in the 13th century by travellers from Polynesia. These expert explorers navigated the wild seas by ocean currents, stars, and wind. Although it is unknown exactly who was on the first waka hourua (voyaging canoe) that arrived in Aotearoa, some suggest the expedition was led by intrepid voyager Kupe.

Discussion Time

What directional stars can we see at night in New Zealand?

It is said Kupe's wife Kuramārōtini devised the name Aotearoa upon first sighting the North Island. What does Aotearoa translate to?

New Arrivals: Europeans 'Discover' New Zealand

Abel Tasman was the first European to 'discover' New Zealand in 1642 but it wasn't until Captain James Cook's arrival in 1769 and his reporting back home that other Europeans, particularly whale and seal hunters, were inspired to migrate over to New Zealand.

From the early 1800s Europeans began to settle in New Zealand. They brought with them diseases that were fatal and foreign to Māori and the Māori population began to rapidly decline due to illnesses.

As the European population grew, so did the demand for land. Māori not only lost their homes and their turangawaewae, but their access to food sources. Traditionally Māori lived off the land. They were excellent hunters on both land and water and cultivated extensive crops of root vegetables like kumara. Their connection and understanding of the land was such that they gathered fungi, berries, seeds and native plants for eating, meal preparation, clothing and medicinal purposes.



Kawakawa - HOKIMATE HARWOOD/KERERU DISCOVERY PROJECT

Survival: The Signing of Two Foundational Documents in Aotearoa History

The United Kingdom wasn't the only foreign party with a vested interest in New Zealand. The French also had their eye on settling here and did so, most successfully in Akaroa, a small town in Christchurch. To protect themselves and their whenua from other countries attempting to claim or invade parts of New Zealand, thirty-four Māori chiefs signed He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga, The Declaration of Independence. A profound document asserting Indigenous rights in New Zealand, the declaration stated that Māori had sovereign power and authority of the land and that no foreign countries could make laws in New Zealand.

Following the signing of the Declaration of Independence on 28 October 1835, was Te Tiriti o Waitangi - The Treaty of Waitangi signed on 6 February 1840. The treaty was an attempt to unite the British crown and Māori chiefs, to build a government in New Zealand and form an agreement on land protection and ownership. However, the treaty was written in two languages: English and te reo Māori and the meanings of certain words in English did not successfully translate to te reo Māori. This meant that Māori were signing one version of the treaty and Pākehā were signing another. Not only this, but the Treaty has long been neglected by the New Zealand government, resulting in an ongoing dispute between Māori and Pākehā.

Discussion Time

How does your school uphold the Principles and Kaupapa of the Treaty of Waitangi?

References and Further Resources

History of Dance

<https://www.newzealand.com/in/feature/haka/#:~:text=The%20M%C4%81ori%20legend%20describing%20the%20causing%20the%20air%20to%20quiver.>

<https://artsonline.tki.org.nz/Teaching-and-Learning/Secondary-teaching-resources/Dance/Reviewed-resources/Key-collection/Discovering-Dance-Teachers-Notes/Maori-dance>

Māori Arrival & Settlement

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/history/page-1>

The Treaty of Waitangi

<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty-of-waitangi>

Māori Theatre

<https://teara.govt.nz/en/maori-theatre-te-whare-tapere-hou/page-2>

Laws Affecting Māori Land

<https://www.tupu.nz/en/tuhono/about-maori-land-in-new-zealand/history-of-maori-land>