

The Selection Criteria for the Evaluation of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies

The Selection Criteria for the Evaluation of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies Resources indicate questions to ask, things to look for and action to take when evaluating resources. In some instances, examples of words and phrases found in unsuitable material have been given.

1. AUTHENTICITY

2. BALANCED NATURE OF THE PRESENTATION

3. ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTICIPATION

4. ACCURACY AND SUPPORT

5. EXCLUSION OF CONTENT OF A SECRET OR SACRED NATURE

1. AUTHENTICITY

Prior to the 1980s, much material contained stereotyped and very generalised information. There are now many resources which have been written by, or in consultation with, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. These resources often contain information about particular groups, thus illustrating the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander groups.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACTION TO TAKE
Is the material up-to-date?	Date of publication.	As a general rule, do not use material published before 1980. Check that the publication is not a reprint of an earlier edition. If unsure, check with your local reference group, community group or indigenous consultant.
Is the material accurate?	Many books indicate that Aboriginal people from some areas no longer exist, e.g. "Truganini was the last Tasmanian Aborigine"; "the Jugara people died out"; "the Kalkadoons were killed in battle". One book cites Yagan, a noted Western Australian man, as being from Victoria. Such statements are not only inaccurate, but offensive.	Consult with Aboriginal Studies consultants, and/or local communities.
Does the material perpetuate the concept of 'terra nullius'?	Statements such as "a vast and empty land" and "explorers discovering vast tracts of unused land" ignore prior occupancy.	Do not use.
Does the material ignore or misrepresent Aboriginal resistance to European occupation of the land?	Aboriginal people are seldom portrayed as defenders of the land to which they belong, but rather as "treacherous", "murderous", etc.	It is best not to use this kind of material with students; use material which presents a balanced view.
Does the material over-generalise?	Statements such as: "the men played didgeridus"; "Aboriginal people hunted kangaroos with spears"; "Torres Strait Islanders cultivated certain vegetables"; and "Aborigines were nomadic"	Avoid using resources that contain sweeping generalisations and which ignore the diversity of Aboriginal cultures and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

	do not apply to all groups.	
Is the number and diversity of both Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal languages and cultures ignored?	Passages which refer to "the Aboriginal language" are misleading. References should state, e.g. the Kamilaroi language; the Western Arrernte language; the Kurna language	<p>Explain to students that such descriptions do not apply to all groups.</p> <p>Locate and use recent publications which clearly distinguish between groups.</p> <p>Apply caution when using resources which do not specify groups (see above).</p> <p>If unsure of information, consult with reference groups or local community.</p>
Are illustrations and photographs positive and accurate portrayals of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people and relevant to the text?	<p>Some illustrations depict Aboriginal people as caricatures, or Europeanised with dark skins, such as the sketches of French naturalist Peron.</p> <p>Some photographs/illustrations are intrusive, demeaning and show negative stereotypes.</p>	Use resources which portray Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people positively, unless such portrayals are to be used as examples of racist and stereotyped reports.
	In some instances, illustrations do not relate directly to the text.	Ensure that illustrations and photographs relate to the text.
Are photographs accompanied by captions which *name the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, or group, and indicate from where they come?	Many photographs do not dignify the person or group with a name and location.	Make students aware of the courtesy of identifying people and groups portrayed. If photographs are of local people or groups, local community members may be able to assist with identification.

In some areas it is not appropriate to use the name or photograph of a deceased person. Consult with local community.

2. BALANCED NATURE OF THE PRESENTATION

Resources in Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies must value the diversity and complexity of these cultures.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACTION TO TAKE
Is there over-representation of men in the material?	Some books over-emphasise the importance of men's roles, particularly in ceremonies and food gathering.	Do not use. Find other resources which present a more balanced view of women and men.
Does the material trivialise women's roles in Aboriginal societies?	Statements and photographs which imply that the male task is more onerous, and trivialise the importance of women's roles, e.g. reference to food suppliers.	Do not use. Select materials that present both men's and women's roles.
Are stereotyping and racist connotations present?	Text and graphics which indicate that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people were far more backward than another race of people.	Do not use the resource with students unless material presenting a more accurate view is also presented or is available for follow up research by students.
	Text which clearly demonstrates the bias of the author, e.g. "treacherous blacks" and "brave settlers".	Do not use unless materials countering these views is also presented.
	References to intellectual and physical capabilities of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, e.g. "uneducable blacks" and "all blacks are good at sports and running".	Do not use unless materials countering these views is also presented.
	The use of derogatory terms to describe Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people.	Do not use the resource with students. If unsure check with Aboriginal Studies consultants, reference groups or local community.
	Phrases which trivialise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander technology e.g. "simple" weapons.	Locate resources which acknowledge the complexity and uniqueness of technology in Aboriginal societies and Torres Strait Islander societies.
	Negative connotations when referring to education, lifestyles, technology, transmission of information, e.g. "The Aborigines had no tradition of reading and	Use resources which have positive content describing the often complex nature of aspects of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal lifestyles, education practices, and transmissions of information.

	writing"; "The Aborigines did not grow crops or keep animals"; "Life was a constant search for food".	
Does the resource exclude some readers by assuming a European background?	A text which suggests that all students ancestors came from colder climates and that unlike 'us', Aboriginal people ate most things raw, assumes there are no Aboriginal students or Torres Strait Islander students in the class.	Use with caution.
Does the resource exclude Torres Strait Islander people?	Materials which do not mention Torres Strait Islander people at all, or those which use an asterisk (*) and footnote indicating that where the term Aboriginal is used alone, it refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Use "Torres Strait Islander" alternately with "Aboriginal" when discussing both groups of people, communities, students, societies, cultures, etc. Never use the term "ATSI", as Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people find this offensive. Provide students with a resource list specifically about Torres Strait Islanders which will be used in conjunction with "Aboriginal" resources.
Does the resource emphasise the 'exotic' to the exclusion of other cultural aspects?	Over-emphasis on mortuary and initiation rites, ceremonies, body ornamentation.	Do not use as general resources. Seek a balanced presentation of cultural aspects.
Does the resource assume that all Torres Strait Islander people and Aboriginal people live in the past?	Phrases such as "Aboriginal artists used natural pigments" ignore recent and present artists. Many history texts have one page or chapter on Aborigines (sometimes ignoring Torres Strait Islander people altogether) pre-1788 with no further reference.	Locate recent publications which have a contemporary focus.

3. ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTICIPATION

It is important that the resource recognises contemporary Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander input as an indication of the cultural diversity of Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and presents these as living, dynamic and changing cultures.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACTION TO TAKE
<p>Is the author Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?</p>	<p>Resources which clearly advise the reader of the author's identity and area of origin.</p>	<p>Read the jacket cover. The background information on it or within the book itself should indicate this.</p> <p>This is one indicator of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander materials, but does not necessarily mean that the content is accurate.</p> <p>Books written by non-indigenous authors may be used if other criteria are met.</p> <p>If unsure, check with a reference group.</p>
<p>Does the resource acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participation in the research, writing and presentation processes?</p>	<p>Names of Torres Strait Islander and/or Aboriginal people who helped in creating the resource.</p> <p>Specific references to Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander groups which contributed to the material's development, e.g. Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups, Aboriginal Medical Service.</p>	<p>Check acknowledgements. If unsure, check with a reference group.</p>

4. ACCURACY AND SUPPORT

Quite often, Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies material used in schools, as well as for general use, is inaccurate. More accurate and well-informed material is now being produced where Aboriginal groups and Torres Strait Islander groups are involved in endorsing manuscripts before publication. However, support for materials may vary from community to community and state to state.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACTION TO TAKE
Is the material about your local area or state?	Supporting statements or endorsements by local, regional or state Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups.	Check recommended resource lists compiled by State and Territory Aboriginal Education Units. If unsure, check with a reference group.
	Look for resources published by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Units.	Obtain a resource list from your resource centre or education unit.
Has the material been endorsed by local, regional, State or Territory Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups?	Acknowledgements to show that the book has been endorsed by the relevant Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.	If unsure, check with a reference group.
Has the material been endorsed by other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander groups?	A foreword, or other statement written by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person or group.	If unsure, check with a reference group.
Is the material acceptable to the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community?	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community endorsement or involvement in development or production - indicated on jacket cover or within the publication.	Check with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

5. EXCLUSION OF CONTENT OF A SECRET OR SACRED NATURE

It can be quite distressing for some Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students to be exposed to material which contains photographs and texts which they should not see. Some anthropologists and others have also published photographs of events which belong to the participants only.

QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	ACTION TO TAKE
Does the material present information about secret and/or sacred items, practices, sites, representations?	Material presenting particular ceremonies and rites being performed, e.g. women's or men's initiation rites.	Do not use without first discussing with local community or with a reference group.
	<p>Materials presenting specific sites, e.g. Dreaming sites of particular groups. Text detailing processes involved in Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal ceremonies and practices.</p> <p>Inclusion of photographs and names of deceased Torres Strait Islander and/or Aboriginal people.</p> <p>Photographs and textual detail of representations which are significant to specific Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander groups, e.g. in some areas, it is not appropriate to view concentric circles.</p>	Consult with local Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islander people, or with a reference group, for examples which are appropriate for indiscriminate viewing.