Aboriginal Studies
Curriculum Support

Stage 5

Integrated study:
Murray Islands community
‘Big idea’
Indigenous peoples’ identities have been challenged by colonialism, yet they have survived and adapted. Indigenous peoples are again in control of their own destiny.

Why does the learning matter?
Students need to recognise that despite powerful attempts to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their basic human rights, they have been resilient and able to survive and prosper.

Target syllabus outcomes
Outcomes 5.1 to 5.11 inclusive. This unit also focuses on the recognition and understanding of the concepts of identity, autonomy, human rights, land ownership, cultural expression and heritage.

Major assessment tasks
• Presentation of a series of postcards which outline the progression of the Murray Islanders’ sense of Identity and Autonomy by focusing on traditional heritage, colonisation, economic and spiritual dispossession, changing cultures, political and social activism, self-determination and autonomy.
• Write a 250-word report that evaluates the success of the active efforts of the Murray Islanders to reclaim their autonomy and identity. Draw on the events outlined in the postcards.

Assessment for learning task 6
Students construct a biography of Eddie Mabo showing their fight for self-determination and design a land rights poster emphasising the concepts of Identity, Autonomy and Cultural Maintenance.

Assessment for learning task 5
Students complete two case studies relating to how the Murray Islanders maintained their autonomy by establishing their own enterprises and using legal and industrial means to do so.

Assessment for learning task 3
Students construct a table to critically assess the impact of European contact on the life of the Murray Islanders and complete a report identifying the key features of this European colonisation.

Assessment for learning task 4
Students compose a newspaper article explaining the impact of European contact and how the Murray Islanders responded to this.

Assessment for learning task 2
Students complete a collage to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the autonomous nature of pre-contact life of the Murray Islanders.

Assessment for learning task 1
Students demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts fundamental to this part of the unit by linking concepts with appropriate definitions.
## Assessment Task

### Marking Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marks</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 16–20 | The Student:  
• Demonstrates extensive knowledge of the factors that have had an impact on Murray Islander identity and autonomy  
• Analyses the actions taken by the Murray Islander people to maintain their identity  
• Clearly describes key events that reflect the changing nature of Murray Islander culture  
• Demonstrates extensive knowledge of the importance of self-determination and autonomy to the Murray Islander people  
• Demonstrates the application and use of very high-level research and communication skills |
| 11–15 | The Student:  
• Demonstrates thorough knowledge of the factors that have had an impact on Murray Islander identity and autonomy  
• Evaluates the actions taken by the Murray Islander people to maintain their identity  
• Clearly describes some events that reflect the changing nature of Murray Islander culture  
• Demonstrates thorough knowledge of the importance of self-determination and autonomy to the Murray Islander people  
• Demonstrates the application and use of high-level research and communication skills |
| 6–10  | The Student:  
• Demonstrates sound knowledge of the factors that have impacted on Murray Islander identity and autonomy  
• Describes the actions taken by the Murray Islander people to maintain their identity  
• Identifies some events that reflect the changing nature of Murray Islander culture  
• Demonstrates sound knowledge of the importance of self-determination and autonomy to the Murray Islander people  
• Demonstrates the application and use of basic levels of research and communication skills |
| 1–5   | The Student:  
• Demonstrates basic knowledge of the factors that have had an impact on Murray Islander identity and autonomy  
• Identifies some actions taken by the Murray Islander people to maintain their identity  
• Identifies few events that reflect the changing nature of Murray Islander culture  
• Demonstrates some knowledge of the importance of self-determination and autonomy to the Murray Islander people  
• Demonstrates the application and use of elementary levels of research and communication skills |
Option 2: Case study of the Murray Islands community

Description
This unit looks to bring together the discrete concepts of ‘Identity’ and ‘Autonomy’ and how they play out in a Torres Strait Island community. It is a snapshot of life in the Torres Strait Islands, in particular the Murray Islands comprising Mer (Murray Island), Dauar (or Dowar) Island and Waier Islet, in Eastern Torres Strait.

Rationale
The purpose of beginning Year 10 with a specific community study of Identity and Autonomy is to revisit, reinforce and review these central concepts and strengthen student understanding by seeing how these concepts have unfolded in a real-life community. The Murray Islands were chosen because of the uniqueness of the Torres Strait Islands for most students, the availability of resources due to the Mabo case and because of the positive experience of the Murray Island people which may counteract the negative view too often associated with the Aboriginal experience of colonisation.

Aim
The key aim of this unit is to consider a number if issues: ways in which the people of the Murray Islands existed as a strong, independent community before contact with European society; how their identity was challenged under white colonial administration; how they persevered and rallied through this to adapt culturally, politically and economically to finally take control of their own destiny. In short, how their identity has been challenged and how it has survived colonisation, with their autonomy restored. The study of the Murray Islands illustrates the resourcefulness and resilience of Indigenous societies.

The focus is on Identity and Autonomy from pre-invasion, to colonisation, to potential destruction, to autonomy.

Planning
The unit was developed along a backwards-mapping sequence. Rather than beginning with the content/learning activities as the basis upon which the rest of the unit was built, the initial step was to outline the ‘big picture’ (what was to be achieved within the unit – what the teacher wants the students to learn from the unit) and then to work backwards through the sequence of learning activities which would best lead to that ‘big picture’. The focus assessment piece was established well before individual learning activities, so the ‘end’, rather than the ‘means’ becomes the focus of the unit.

Resources
Loos, N and Mabo, K, 1996, Edward Koiki Mabo: His Life and Struggle for Land Rights,
University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.
Singe, J, My Island Home.
Wilson, L and Lu, K, 1993, Contemporary Artefacts of the Torres Strait Islanders, Department of Education, Queensland, HSC Online.
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Torres Strait Islander stories: ‘Sararai and Waubin’, ‘Widul and Marte and their Brother Umai’ and ‘Agabe and the Men of Saibai’.

‘The story of Gelam’ DVD (a Torres Strait story by Lydia George) in *The Dreaming – Series 1.*
Available from Aboriginal Nations Pty Ltd, FSA 210 Driver Ave, Moore Park NSW 2021.

Shakaya – their songs and lyrics
[www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/therap/interviews/s1304317.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rollercoaster/therap/interviews/s1304317.htm)

The Torres Strait Islander songbook:
Ron Edwards (ed & illus), *Some Songs from the Torres Strait*. 177 traditional songs with notes and music.
Songbooks from particular islands also available on this site.

Black Words – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writers and Storytellers
Major Assessment Task

Scenario
Like other Indigenous peoples of Australia, the Murray Islanders have sought to resist the impacts of colonisation on their identity and autonomy.

(a) Design a series of 10 postcards that describe the threats to Murray Islanders’ culture and heritage and outline the way they have responded to them. Students should use the following categories to guide the development of the postcards.

- Traditional Murray Islander heritage
- European colonisation of Murray Island
  - Economic and spiritual erosion/dispossession
  - Changing cultures
- Reclaiming autonomy
  - Self-determination
  - Political and social activism

Each postcard needs to be A5 size, with a picture/backdrop applicable to the Murray Islands and an 80-word description of a person, theme or issue related to one or more of the above categories.

(b) Write a 250-word report that evaluates the success of the active efforts of the Murray Islanders to reclaim their autonomy and identity. Draw on the events outlined in the postcards.

Advice for students
The following checklist will help you to successfully complete these tasks.

- Throughout these tasks you should demonstrate your understanding of how the Murray Islands people have been able to maintain their unique identity while adapting to the process of colonisation.
- Both tasks should emphasise the principles of identity and autonomy.
- You might like to include written information and visual images which relate to aspects of Murray Islands cultural expression AND events which demonstrate their levels of autonomy, such as the 1936 Maritime Strike, the Mabo case etc.

Value: 20 marks
Outcomes

A student:

5.1 describes the factors that contribute to an Aboriginal person’s identity
5.2 explains ways in which Aboriginal peoples maintain their identity
5.3 describes the dynamic nature of Aboriginal cultures
5.4 explains adaptations in, and the changing nature of, Aboriginal cultural expression across time and location
5.5 explains the importance of families and communities to Aboriginal peoples
5.6 explains the importance of self-determination and autonomy to all aspects of Aboriginal peoples’ participation nationally and internationally
5.7 assesses the significance of contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Australian society
5.8 analyses the interaction of the wider Australian community with Aboriginal peoples and cultures
5.9 analyses how personal beliefs and political, economic, media and social factors influence attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples and their cultures
5.10 independently identifies and applies appropriate community consultation protocols and ethical research practices to gather and interpret data
5.11 independently uses a range of research techniques and technologies to locate, select, organise and communicate information and findings.
### Students learn about/Students learn to:

- factors that contribute to and influence the personal, cultural and community identity of the Murray Islander

- describe the factors that contribute to a Murray Islander’s identity, such as family and community, life experiences, language, traditions, cultural mores and practices, customs, artefacts and artisans

### Teaching and learning activities

**Students:**
Drawing on their Year 9 knowledge and experiences, students are to match/explain and discuss the following concepts from the *Aboriginal Studies Years 7–10 Syllabus* glossary pp 58–61, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>autonomy</td>
<td>people being taken or forced away from their land and culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>colonisation</td>
<td>a set of common understandings shared by members of a community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>culture</td>
<td>all things physical, spiritual and geographical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dispossession</td>
<td>Aboriginal meanings and understandings of creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreaming</td>
<td>the importance of relationships and of belonging to the land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identity</td>
<td>where a colonial power imposes a system of government based on its own laws and values on another group of people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kinship</td>
<td>acting independently, self-government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>land</td>
<td>view of who you are, your self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students:**

Using a range of sources, students are to make a collage of pre-contact Torres Strait Islander life/identity under the following headings:
- people
- geography
- language
- employment
- spirituality
- customs

### Evidence of learning (formal and informal)

Students will demonstrate their understanding of the key concepts fundamental to this part of the unit.

Students demonstrate knowledge of locality of the Murray Islands.
### Students learn about/
*Students learn to:*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and learning activities</th>
<th>Evidence of learning (formal and informal)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• technologies</td>
<td>Students complete a collage to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the autonomous nature of pre-contact life of the Murray Islanders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• oral traditions/Dreaming stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• pastimes.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Students:**  
Students are to share with the class their collages and explain the choice of images and what they depict about pre-contact Torres Strait peoples. The collage should contain pictures/drawings (the teacher could supply some of these) and labels (taken from the list above) which reflect the concepts studied, particularly the unique and autonomous nature of life on the Murray Islands eg fishing, fish nets, Meriam words, dugongs, ceremonial headdress etc.

**Teacher:**  
Once the collages are completed and posted around the classroom, brainstorm with the students the key features of pre-contact life on the Murray Islands. Emphasise the autonomy and sovereignty of the Murray Islanders that existed within this pre-contact society. Students are to write these brainstorm ideas up as a set of class notes.

| • the influence of social factors and experiences on Aboriginal identity | Students identify the impact of European contact on the people of the Murray Islands. |
| • identify the factors that have affected the development of the identity of Murray Islanders in post-invasion society: |                                          |
| − imposed use of English and loss of Aboriginal languages |                                          |
| − economic factors |                                          |
| − multimedia |                                          |

**Teacher:**  
Using the resources listed above, especially Wilson & Lu (1993), present students with an outline of the history of the Torres Strait Islands, in particular the Murray Islands, regarding their contact with Europeans and the impact of that process of colonisation. This timeline will cover the period 1870–1960.

**Students:**  
Using this information, students are to write a one-page report describing the major impacts of these events upon the life of Murray Islanders. This should contain dates and references to:
• first contacts
• development of trade with Europeans
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<table>
<thead>
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</table>
| – influence of religious groups         | • the decline of Indigenous gardening and fishing enterprises  
• introduction of Christianity, English language and new customs.  
It is important to emphasise that many aspects of traditional life still continued, however (eg farming and fishing practices, language, customs, law and family relationships) | Students critically assess the impact of European contact on the life of the Murray Islanders. |
| • draw conclusions about the effects of social factors on identity | • the use of a combination of pre-invasion and post-invasion adaptations in the expression of culture  
• describe expressions of traditional cultures in post-invasion contexts, for example dance  
• draw conclusions about adaptations in Murray Islander cultural expressions that reflect the dynamic and resilient nature of culture  
• recognise the validity and significance of adaptations of cultural expression |  |
| Teacher/Students: Use the reports completed above by students to provide details and to assess how the traditional life of the Murray Islander people was affected by colonisation. Teacher and class work together to construct a table comparing pre-contact and post-contact life, with an emphasis on how the people of the Murray Islands adapted to these changes with regard to:  
• language  
• employment  
• spirituality  
• customs  
• technologies  
• oral traditions/Dreaming stories/written expression  
• pastimes.  
Teacher:  
Work with the class, scaffolding the material gathered by students, perhaps as a brainstorming exercise. Reinforce meaning and key features that describe each feature. Once the students complete the table, their ability to analyse and assess the impact of European contact can be assessed. An example of the scaffold could include:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Traditional language still largely spoken. Most people bilingual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Gardening largely and fishing continue, but trade has been replaced by commercial fishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Dreaming largely replaced by Christianity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Aboriginal Studies – Curriculum Support, Stage 5
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students learn about</strong></td>
<td>Teacher to work with class on the structure of newspaper articles, identifying their key elements. Models from <em>Koori Mail</em> and <em>Indigenous Times</em> could be used. (Teacher ref. <em>English K–6 Syllabus</em> (2006) esp. the section on factual texts.)</td>
<td>Students critically analyse the impact of Torres Strait actions to preserve their ongoing contact with cultural identity through a personal report written from the view of the Murray Island people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students learn to</strong></td>
<td>Discuss the process of colonisation and aspects of cultural, political and social change for the communities in the Torres Strait Islands. Note how strong the people of the Murray Islands have been with maintaining their culture and identity during this process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>Research the internet to find out about the Maritime Strike of 1936, which was organised by the people of the Murray Islands. Using the information gathered, students to complete a short report in the form of a newspaper article on the Strike of 1936 to show Murray Islanders’ attempts to maintain their culture and identity. The article must give specific details, a picture and evidence that demonstrates the independence and autonomous actions of the Murray Island people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>Write a 300-word report in the form of a newspaper article to describe and explain how European contact affected the life of Murray Islanders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td><strong>Extension activity:</strong> Students who have demonstrated a grasp of the events could be challenged to write an opinion piece, representing the student taking a particular viewpoint of these events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

- the importance and interrelationship of land and spiritual identity as expressed through a wide range of cultural expressions
- expressions of self-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Students are to use the internet to research the following important political events that occurred in the period from the 1970s to the 1990s:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>- the <em>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</em> which states:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘In the administration of this Act, regard shall be had to the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the Torres Strait Treaty and in particular to the traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>independence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students learn about/Students learn to:  
- determination and their influence on Murray Islanders’ cultural expression  
- analyse examples of the ways in which Murray Islanders exercise their autonomy and how these influence their cultural expression  
- recognise the importance of the relationship of land and spiritual identity to Murray Island people and investigate its expression through cultural activities, including Dreaming stories  
- describe a variety of ways in which Murray Island people express their relationship to the land

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| way of life and livelihood of traditional inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing:  
- the 1985 Torres Strait Treaty which was signed by Australia and Papua New Guinea  
- 1994 establishment of the Torres Strait Regional Authority  
- 1995 official recognition the Torres Strait Islands flag.  
**Teacher:**  
Discuss how each of these events has been important in recognising the significance of and interrelationship between land ownership and identity. Both the Act and the Treaty stress the importance of land and traditional culture, whilst the design of the Torres Strait Islands flag features aspects of both.  
**Students:**  
Draw the Torres Strait Islands flag and write a 150-word explanation of the flag’s key features (images and representations) and list the significance of each of the elements to Torres Strait Islander culture and identity.  
Students assess the importance of these efforts to the maintenance of cultural connection.  
Students explain the importance of the Torres Strait Islands flag and its cultural significance to its people.

- human rights, self-determination and autonomy, including social justice and equity and the effects of dispossession of land, massacres and genocide  
- revisit and discuss the terms and concepts of ‘human rights’, ‘self-determination’, ‘autonomy’, ‘social justice’

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cultural heritage</td>
<td>land belonging to no one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human rights</td>
<td>Indigenous property rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>land rights</td>
<td>struggle of Aboriginal peoples for the ownership of their lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Title</td>
<td>participation of Aboriginal people in all decision-making that affects them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>self-determination</td>
<td>measures that address all inequities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Students:**  
Revisit earlier work on Identity and Autonomy to discuss and match the following concepts from the *Aboriginal Studies Years 7–10 Syllabus* glossary (see pp 58–61):  
Students develop critical understanding of key terminology of human rights and self-determination.
<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and ‘equity’</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>identify ongoing Murray Island people’s reactions to the denial of human rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>social justice universal and inalienable rights possessed by individuals</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terra nullius the continuation of a group’s culture, from generation to generation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher:**
Investigate how Torres Strait Island people responded to these changes to the various Acts and court decisions, and their efforts to safeguard their heritage and identity, in particular their rights to land and water, with regard to preserving self-determination and autonomy.

**Teacher:**
Focus on the following examples of Murray Islands people exercising their preparedness to defend their economic and cultural interests:

- Murray Islander fishing enterprises using ‘company boats’ during the early 20th Century
- Murray Island people instigating the Maritime Strike of 1936
- Exercising the rights of Torres Strait Islanders to form their own commercial fishing enterprises under the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR) and the Croker Island Claim of 1998.

The study of each of these should emphasise how the people of the Murray Islands have responded to government control during the period of the Aboriginal Protection Policy (which prohibited them from owning land and commercial enterprises). Stress the issue of human rights abuse which is evident during this period and how the Murray Islands people reacted to this.

**Students:**
Students are to use this study to assess the significance and contribution of the Murray Islands people in attaining self-determination and autonomy. They are to demonstrate this by completing two case studies, from the examples above. Each case study must outline the details of the event and briefly explain how it has enabled Murray Islander people to influence key decision-making and exercise real autonomy over their lives.

Students assess the significance of efforts of Torres Strait Islanders to maintain their economic and/or cultural autonomy.
### Students learn about/Students learn to:

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the relationship of human rights to self-determination and autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• draw conclusions about the importance of human rights for Murray Islands autonomy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching and learning activities

**Teacher:**

- Brief review of Australia’s obligations as a member of the United Nations Organisation and a signatory to its international covenants. Australia is morally bound to uphold those covenants.
- The *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (ICESCR), to which Australia is a signatory, states that it is a right of Indigenous peoples to control their lands, territories and resources.
- Explain how the Human Rights Commission (HRC) uses this Covenant to secure the continuation of traditional forms of hunting, fishing, and gathering.

**Teacher/Students:**

Discuss with students the importance for the Murray Island people of being able to control their lands, territories and resources. How have the Murray Islanders used these UN covenants to prosecute their demands for social and cultural independence?

Work with students to help construct a short biography of Koiki (Eddie) Mabo. The teacher should start the process by supplying two or three key dates (eg born – 1936, died – 1992, High Court Case commenced – 1982, etc) then ask students to complete the timeline using a variety of online resources.

The following are examples of the many possible sources.


**Teacher:**

**Eddie Mabo and Native Title**

Teacher to introduce the concepts of Native Title, the role of the Mabo case in challenging the legal concept of *terra nullius*, and the importance of the decision for Aboriginal peoples. Teacher to stress the importance of the case for the people of the Murray Islands and their continuous link with the islands, its laws and customs.

### Evidence of learning (formal and informal)

<p>| | | |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students assess the importance of Australia’s international obligations to ensuring the human rights of its citizens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students assess how Eddie Mabo was able to prove the maintenance of a continuous relationship with the Murray Islands.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students assess the importance of Eddie Mabo to the Murray Islanders’ demand for self-determination.</td>
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</table>
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</table>
| • the importance of the return of land and economic independence to Murray Island people and communities in fulfilling the goal of self-determination  
  • draw conclusions about the links between land and economic independence, and Murray Islanders’ self-determination | Students: Choose two articles from the extensive list provided at: http://www.trinity.wa.edu.au/plduffyrc/indig/mabo.htm. Using these examples, have the students prepare a class pbWiki (interactive collection of websites used for collating information on a topic that can have multiple contributors: see http://api.pbwiki.com/) on the importance of the recognition of Native Title on Aboriginal identity. | Students assess the significance of contributions of Aboriginal people to Australian society, especially through their actions in establishing the recognition of Indigenous peoples’ land rights. |

Summary
To examine the BROAD impact of the Mabo decision on the Australian community today, ESPECIALLY NSW. Be sure to feature the aspects of:
• challenge to terra nullius  
• identity – change and continuity  
• autonomy – self-determination  
• land, heritage and cultural maintenance.

Students:
Students create a Land Rights poster for display, which features the language (key terms such as ‘land’, ‘now’, ‘freedom’) and symbols (Aboriginal flag, use of colours, totems etc) and rhetoric (phrases such as ‘black rights’, ‘our land’, ‘White Australia has a Black History’) of the Land Rights movement. Students should be made aware of the significance of these features in being able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the significance of land rights to Aboriginal autonomy and self-determination.

The context of this poster could centre on a local/regional location of known significance to Aboriginal peoples. (Seek advice from the local Aboriginal Lands Council.)