

Giiirr Maaru

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY JULY 2021



yananka warruwi
walking the path



GOMEROI
CULTURE ACADEMY

Supporting and inspiring our
next generation of leaders.

On Country Learning

In the April school holidays, the GCA took an adventure through the Warrumbungles, the Pilliga and the Kaputar Ranges which are all significant places within the Gomeroi nation's cultural landscape. The trip was developed around our theme for the year – 'Everything has Story' – and the opportunity for students to learn the importance of reading Country, and understanding the links between sites and stories.

To begin our trip, we stopped at Gunnedah to hear the story of Cumbo Gunerah (the Red Chief) and visit sites associated with his story. This story has been shared by Gomeroi people for hundreds of years and teaches many important lessons, including the importance of following rules and to not abuse power.

In Coonabarabran we visited Burra Bee Dee Aboriginal Mission. Here, students participated in a smoking ceremony lead by Brett Ashby.

Brett shared stories of the old mission and the ways that people lived. Students were also introduced to 5 corners, a bush food that is very popular with the community connected to Burra Bee Dee.

The next stop was the Pilliga Bore Baths which are fed by the Great Artesian Basin and are connected to special Dreaming Stories across the northwest of NSW and beyond. Students were able to hear the story and swim in the waters.



At Mt Kaputar, Steven Booby from NSW Office of Environment and Heritage provided a tour of Sawn Rocks, one of Australia's best basalt rock formations. Here students heard the creation story, and how the site is connected to other special places, and discussed responsibilities and the importance of having purpose.

On the final day, we ventured to the highest point on Gomeroi country, the peak of Mt Kaputar which stands 1489m above sea level. From here students could see the extent of Gomeroi Country back to the

Warrumbungles, and we discussed the different communities across the landscape, and how they are connected through story, kinship and songlines.

A last stop was to Deriah Aboriginal Area, which is co-managed by the Narrabri Aboriginal community and National Parks, and holds great cultural significance. This visit extended the conversation about responsibility and the importance of caring for Country.

Overall, the trip provided students with a hands-on experience that allowed them to connect to Country and each other in a way that was not previously possible. Students spoke about the impact of the trip, and referred to it many times throughout the term.



GATHERINGS

This term we have focused on relationships, connection, and personal growth. Students learned about the Gomeri kinship system, and have been supporting each other to learn its complexities.

Across our gatherings students have had the opportunity to participate in family research and better understand kinship connections, who they are and where they come from. By spending time working on their family trees, and asking questions of family members, students have been able to learn personal stories, and strengthen their own identity.

Students visited the Tamworth Botanic Gardens, a culturally significant place connected to 'Garrawal Garaarr' and now the home of the local Aboriginal Keeping Place, Aboriginal garden and relocated scarred trees. In exploring these, students had the opportunity to identify artefacts and sites that demonstrate our continuous connection to Gomeri country. They learned to identify flaked stones and cores and were able to spot a couple in situ on a walk around the Gardens. Students also learnt to identify different native plants and trees that grow locally and how they are used for weaving, dyes, food and medicine.

Students have spent time practicing language, by continuing to learn and practice the Acknowledgement to Country, selected phrases and Gomeri stories in the group, which has also helped to boost confidence speaking in front of others.

Students were introduced to the idea of 'growth mindset' as a leadership tool, and have each been given a journal to record their growth and development.



MENTORING



Students have been continuing to work towards their Cultural Learning Plan goals, and have been making great progress with the support of their cultural mentors.

Each week the boys spend time with their cultural mentor Bareki to develop their skills in playing Yidaki. They have been practicing circular breathing using different techniques to strengthen their muscles and increase their playing time, which include playing into a bucket of a water and timing each other. They have been supporting each other to build their confidence playing in front of an audience, and each have locked in a performance towards the end of the year.

The girls have continued to learn more about the weaving process, and its place in Gomeri culture. They picked up the weaving stitch quite quickly and have spent time practicing weaving

techniques, listening to stories, and becoming more confident in understanding each part of the weaving process. They are always eager to hear and discuss stories, and what the lessons and values mean to them.

Patience and persistence have been key this term as the girls learn the importance of sitting and watching, and taking their time with their weaving.



SOUNDS OF MYALL CREEK



In June, students, Alumni and staff attended the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial 'Sounds of Country' concert in Bingara. This special event is part of the annual memorial that pays tribute to a massacre of 28 Wirrayaraay people at Myall Creek Station in 1838.

The concert was an opportunity for Alumni and current students to come together for the day. Due to COVID this has been the largest get together we have had for some time, with 17 attending.



At the concert, students were asked to join the Gomeroidance Company and perform some of the traditional dance they have learnt through the GCA. For many it was their first time, but after hearing the reason behind the concert the students were proud to keep the story alive.

Before and after performing, students met and spoke with community Elders and artists including Aunty Sue Blacklock and Uncle Roger Knox. Uncle Roger was so inspired by the passion and pride of our students he invited them to dance while he performed one of his songs.

Students were moved to hear stories about the Myall Creek Massacre, and frontier wars that took place across Gomeroidance Country and across the nation. Through conversations, students were exposed to the real impact of these events on our communities, both past and present and the importance of healing not only ourselves but each other and our Country.



TAMWORTH OBSERVATORY OVERVIEW

In May, students were supported by the Tamworth Regional Gallery to visit the new Tamworth Regional Astronomy and Science Centre, before its official opening.

Current and past students were taken on a tour and introduced to Astronomy Club members who shared their knowledge and experience.

We were able to have a closer look at several constellations



through the telescope, including Yarrandu (Southern Cross), and had discussions about Warrambuul (the Milkyway) and Dhinawan (Emu in the sky). This allowed students to extend their learnings from the Warrumbungles where they learnt about the stars.

The students were amazed to see galaxies 15 million light-years away through the very rare Hewitt Camera, one of only two in the world, and hear the connection that science has with our traditional stories, and how these stories connect with us today.



RECONCILIATION DIDGE WORKSHOP

During Reconciliation Week, a group of our GCA boys were invited to attend a woodcarving workshop with world renowned didgeridoo (Yidaki) player Mark Atkins. The workshop was organised by North West Local Land



Services and saw Alumni and students come together to participate.

The workshop provided an opportunity for GCA students to connect with local community members, learn new skills and build on their existing knowledge. Guided by Mark Atkins, students were shown how to carve a Yidaki from a raw hollow log and transform it into a sacred instrument. Mark also shared some of his skills playing Yidaki and students were quick to soak up the experience.

Students spent the day by the fire, carving and sanding their own items, including didgeridoos, boomerangs and clap sticks and were extremely proud of the work they accomplished.

THE GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY STORY

Gomeroid Culture has been passed down between generations for thousands of years. Story-telling, dance, and other cultural practices such as weaving, have been integral to the development of cultural identity and values for young people.

The GCA harnesses the strength and knowledge that exists within our community to support our young people. The individually tailored program and mentorship will enable participants to learn more about their culture, strengthen and develop their own identity, and have a greater opportunity for success.

The GCA is not an alternative to school. Our commitment is to work closely in partnership with schools and assist them to support students to flourish and be passionate about their future.

Giirr Maaru
("gear-ed mar-roo")

This is a positive phrase that means well done, good stuff or great job. The name has been chosen to reflect and recognise the work that is being achieved by GCA students within the structured activities and other achievements in their lives.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Gomeroid Cultural Academy has been designed and is delivered by the Gomeroid Dance Company and Yinarr Maramali, who have been, both formally and informally, mentoring young people in the local community for over a decade. Both the Gomeroid Dance Company and Yinarr Maramali are active members of the community and are passionate about inspiring our next generation of leaders. The Gomeroid Culture Academy is made possible by the support of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

Gomeroid Culture Academy

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