



Indigenous Culture in the Upper Murray

Ochre Questions

For thousands of years, our Indigenous people had to use the landscapes around them for food, water, shelter and to make fire. Aboriginal people had to use the land to make their own paint. In ceremonies and corroborees, they would use ochre to paint their bodies.

1. What is ochre?
2. What were some of the traditional colours of ochre?
3. Apart from ornamentation what was another traditional use for ochre?
4. What was the "law of wind" and how was ochre employed in this law?
5. What was ochre traditionally mixed with so that it could be applied to the skin or implements?
6. Can you remember what Talea said about how ochre was applied to young girls and boys?

Extension Question

7. Can you think where else ochre might have been used?



Indigenous Culture in the Upper Murray

Ochre Answers

1. Ochre is a mineral clay mined from the ground. A traditional source of white clay on the Upper Murray is Pipeclay Hill near Tooma, a small settlement south of Tumbarumba. The colour of red ochre could be enhanced by placing it in the fire.
2. Red, yellow, white and all shades in between. Red ochre usually contained high concentrations of iron oxide (Rust!) giving it its reddish-brown hue.
3. Bush medicine – to relieve stomach complaints acting in a similar manner to what antacid remedies such as *Mylanta*, *Eno* and *Quickeze* do in western medicines.
4. It was blown out ahead of people when travelling through the landscape to mark country.
5. Water, fat, the contents of bird eggs, blood or sap.
6. Girls are painted with dots while boys are marked with stripes. The placement and style of the dots and stripes have special meaning dependant on stage of development or change of status of that individual within society.
7. There were many other uses. Some examples are to make pigment or paint for rock art and to enhance the intricate decorations on the interior of possum skin blankets. The inside (flesh side) of each individual skin which made up the blanket was lightly scored with a design using a sharpened mussel shell or other such implement and ochre was rubbed into the design to highlight the image.

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