Significant Individuals - David Unaipon

Stage 3
History: Year 6

**Topic:** Australia as a Nation
The development of Australia as a nation, particularly after 1901. Students explore the factors that led to Federation and experiences of democracy and citizenship over time. Students understand the significance of Australia's British heritage, the Westminster system and other models that influenced the development of Australia's system of government.

**Key inquiry question #1:** What contribution have significant individuals and groups made to the development of Australian society?

**Featured Content**

Mari Nawi: Aboriginal Odysseys

Video of Mari Nawi: Aboriginal Odysseys
To download the Mari Nawi: Aboriginal Odysseys transcript, click [here](https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au) [1].

**Content Summary**

The contribution of individuals and groups, including Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders and migrants, to the development of Australian society, for example in areas such as the economy, education, science, the arts, sport. (ACHHK116)

Students:

- use a range of sources to investigate the role of a particular man, woman or group and the contributions each made to the shaping of the colony.

**Background Notes for teachers**

David Unaipon (1872 - 1967) was an author, inventor, evangelical preacher and political activist whose string of accomplishments was contrary to the prejudiced stereotypes held about Aboriginal people at the time. Unaipon is a simplified version of his name Ngunaitponi. He was a man of deep religious convictions, high intelligence and considerable mechanical and oratorical skills. By the 1920s he was the most well-known Aboriginal person in Australia.

David Unaipon was born at the Point McLeay Mission in South Australia where his father, James Ngunaitponi, had been appointed church deacon. When David was thirteen he began working as a servant for CB Young, who encouraged what would be a life-long infatuation with philosophy, literature and science. However despite his singular and extensive self-education there were no opportunities for Aboriginal people of his talents, and he was frustrated in obtaining any intellectually demanding work.

Despite these setbacks, his obsession with the idea of developing mechanisms for achieving perpetual motion bore fruit when he applied his knowledge more practically and patented a modified shearing handpiece in 1909. Its innovation was that it changed the movement of the shears from a circular to a lateral direction, greatly improving its efficiency.

Over the next few years David Unaipon continued to improve plans and prototypes with some financial assistance from the anthropologist Herbert Basedow. By 1944 David Unaipon had made nine different applications to patent various inventions but was never able to fully develop and take advantage of these patents due to lack of money.

In addition to his inventiveness David Unaipon was also a political advocate of equality for Aboriginal people and assisted inquiries and commissions into Aboriginal welfare and treatment. In 1927 when his book of Aboriginal legends, Hurgarrda was published, he became the first Australian Aboriginal author. This was followed by Kinnie Ger - the Native Cat in 1928 and his main work, Native Legends, in 1929. A collection of his legends was published, without acknowledgement, by W. Ramsay Smith as Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals in 1930. He also published several autobiographical works in later life.

As a committed Christian and evangelist he travelled widely in South Australia, preaching in cities and towns up until his retirement at age 87. He died aged 94 at Tailem Bend.
Student Activities

- Activity 1
- Activity 2

Activity 1

Biography Planner [2]

Students examine sources from the State Library collection and conduct their own research into David Unaipon's contribution to Australian society.

Number of set tasks: 1
Activity 2

**Persuasive text** [3]

Using the Biography Planner from Activity 1, students write a persuasive exposition that explains why David Unaipon was chosen for the $50 note.

Number of set tasks: 1
MANUSCRIPT

ABORIGINAL FOLK LORNE etc., BY DAVID UNAIPON

CONTENTS

Portrait
Preface
Introduction (Aboriginal Folk Lore)
1. Aboriginals — Their Traditions
2. Some Stories about my Race — What Aboriginal Carvings Mean
3. Belief of the Aborigine in a Great Spirit
4. Confusion of Tongue
5. Fishing
6. Berawa Trinb: Flood and its Result
7. The Cherawhar (Goanna)
8. Goil Lun, Maga (Green Frog)
9. Hunting
10. How the Tortoac got his Shell
11. Immortality
12. Love Story of the Mar-Ballang
13. The Mar Kar Ree (Moon)
14. Marriage Customs of the Australian Aboriginal
15. The Mischiefous Crow — and the Good He Did
16. Harroondaria Wives
17. Nhung e umpie
18. Fan Fari Iowia, Spirit of Help
19. Sport
20. Story of the Mungingeet
22. The Water Rat who discovered the Secret of Fire
23. Whowie
24. Why all the Animals Peck at the Selfish Owl
25. Why Frogs Jump into the Water
26. Witchcraft
27. Wondangar, Goon Na Gham (Whale and Star Fish)
28. A Wonderful Bun-bun-rung Lizard
29. Yera Na Yha Who
30. How Teddy Lost his Tail
Activity Notes for Teachers

Students use images and written sources to ask historical questions about the past.

- The activities are designed to introduce students to images and written sources as historical records of people, places and events in the past.
- Students examine images and written sources from the State Library of NSW to investigate the role and contributions of a particular man, woman or group and the contributions each made to the shaping of the colony during the early years of the British colony.

Teachers should be aware that, in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, hearing names or seeing images of deceased persons may cause sadness or distress, particularly to the relatives of these people.

Additional Resources

- Philip Jones, 'Unaipon, David (1872–1967)' [4], Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University
- Racism, No Way: anti-racism education for Australian schools [5]
- Australian War Memorial: Forging the nation: Federation, the first twenty years [6]

NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum History K - 10

Outcomes

A student:

- HT3-1 describes and explains the significance of people, groups, places and events to the development of Australia
- HT3-2 describes and explains different experiences of people living in Australia over time
- HT3-5 applies a variety of skills of historical inquiry and communication
Historical Skills

Students:

Comprehension: Chronology, terms and concepts

- use historical terms and concepts (ACHHS099, ACHHS118)

Use of sources

- locate information related to inquiry questions in a range of sources. (ACHHS102, ACHHS121)

Perspectives and interpretations

- identify points of view in the past and present (ACHHS104, ACHHS123)

Research

- identify and locate a range of relevant sources to support an historical inquiry (ACHHS101, ACHHS120)

Explanation and communication

- develop texts, particularly narratives and descriptions, which incorporate source materials (ACHHS105, ACHHS124)
- use a range of communication forms (oral, graphic, written) and digital technologies (ACHHS106, ACHHS125)

Historical Concepts

- **Cause and effect**: events, decisions or developments in the past that produce later actions, results or effects
- **Significance**: the importance of an event, development or individual/group

LAC

Learning across the curriculum:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Literacy
- Personal and social capability
- Work and enterprise

Student Activities

- [Activity #1](#)
Activity #1

**Biography Planner [2]**

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Activity #2

**Persuasive text**

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Related content

David Unaipon [7]

A great inventor, an Indigenous rights advocate and Australia's first published Aboriginal writer.

Source URL: https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/learning/significant-individuals-david-unaipon

Links