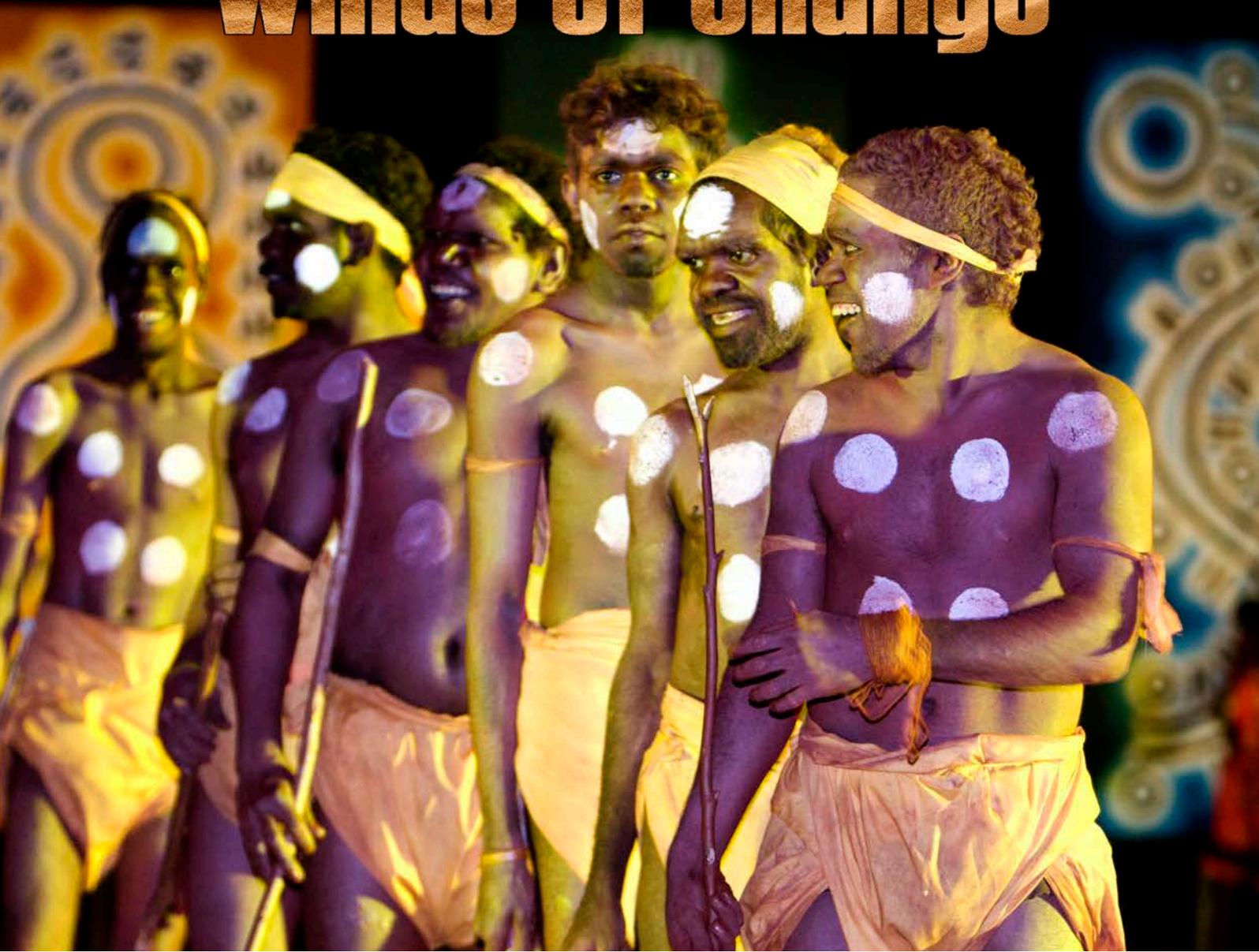


# milpirri

## winds of change



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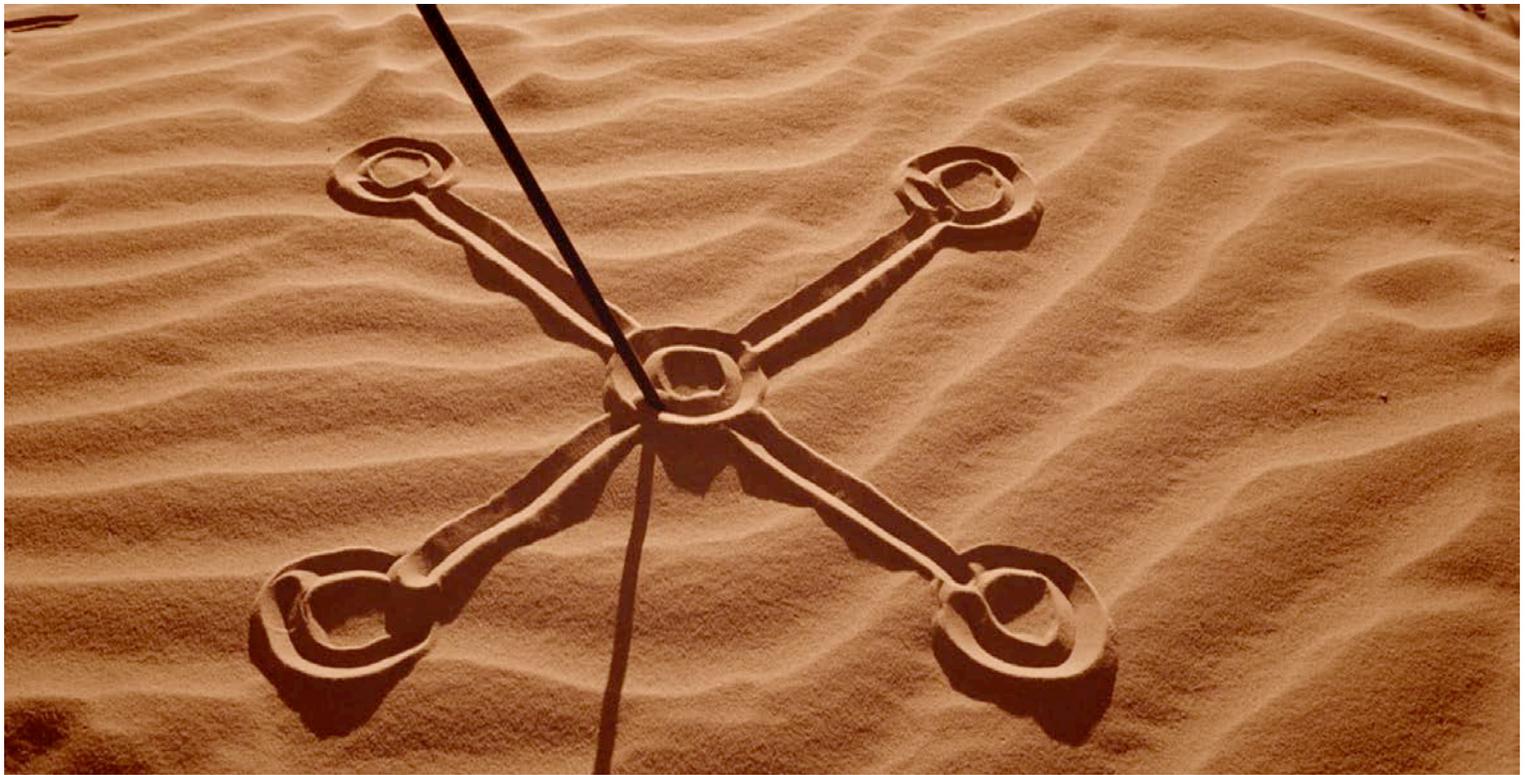
# milpirri

## winds of change

A STUDY GUIDE

*If something is alive it has a communication system. Country is alive. Trees, birds, day and night, how the Milpirri clouds are formed, is country communicating with us. We all just need to be reminded to listen to country again. — WANTA JAMPIJINPA PATRICK*

**Please note:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this study guide may contain images of people who have died.



## Overview

*Milpirri: Winds of Change* is a one-hour documentary about a unique cross-cultural event created and performed by the Warlpiri people of Lajamanu, a community on the edge of the Tanami Desert in the Northern Territory in conjunction with Tracks Dance. *Milpirri* are literally the huge clouds that form over the Tanami Desert just before the rainy season, bringing rain from the collision of the hot air from the land and the cold air from above; the meeting of opposites. The biennial music, dance and cultural event of Milpirri reminds us all, that to find our way 'back home,' we need to listen to *ngurra*, 'home' – the country we share. Milpirri seeks to retell traditional Warlpiri stories in the context of a modern celebration and modern community living.

The film is not just a record of the community activities leading up to Milpirri; it is also an exploration of life today for the people of Lajamanu. As we watch the community preparations leading to the performance of Milpirri, expressed through music and dance, we also see something of the challenges and struggles facing many Indigenous Australians today to retain, strengthen and celebrate their culture and way of life, much of which has been disrupted and damaged since the arrival of white people.

How can young people retain the strengths of their culture and respect for traditions in a time and place where there are so many outside distractions? What will happen when the Elders who pass on knowledge and culture are no longer around? Can technology and working with *Kardiya* (non-Indigenous) help keep the *Yapa* (Indigenous) culture alive and strong? While Milpirri is very much a *Yapa* initiative, it also actively involves the collaboration of non-*Yapa* in staging Milpirri.





## The intentions of the filmmakers

Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick is the Co-Writer/Co-Director and Narrator of *Milpirri: Winds of Change*. He is an initiated Warlpiri leader from Lajamanu in the Northern Territory. Wanta is an educator, artist, filmmaker and the Artistic Director of Milpirri (created with Tracks Dance) a biennial cross-cultural celebration. He is passionate about Warlpiri culture, its importance to all people and working together to show what it is to be Warlpiri — to listen to country and respect the lessons it can teach us. Wanta believes that “It is desperate times for *Yapa* (Indigenous People). A lot of the old people are now gone. We have got to get all these stories out....We risk losing thousands of years of this country’s identity.”

What do Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick and the Lajamanu community say they hope to achieve with *Milpirri*?

1. To excite the young about culture
2. To excite the old with the knowledge that the young are interested
3. To stimulate reconciliation between old and young, black and white, traditional and modern
4. To inspire the community to pass on the stories and the knowledge they hold and to find new ways to do this

5. To engage broader Australian interest in Warlpiri and Indigenous culture

Wanta Jampijinpa, Stewart Carter and Cath South came together to share their skills in making this film. They met in 2006 when they worked together to create a short film about Warlpiri literacy in Lajamanu. Wanta belongs to the Warlpiri world but has experience in living and working with the culture of non-Indigenous Australians.

The documentary took a number of years to create and is the result of cultures working together — *Milpirri*; and making the film was done slowly and carefully — *Pulyaranyi*.

While making the film, Wanta, Stewart and Cath spent an enormous amount of time discussing cultural meanings to try to avoid simplification of Warlpiri concepts in the documentary. At the preview screening, Cath, the editor of the film, said, “We all felt it was more important the audience be left wanting to know more, than to feel they understood everything from one documentary. Real learning takes time, *Pulyaranyi*.”

The Darwin based Tracks Dance Company is an integral part of *Milpirri*.



## Tracks Dance Company

A 1988 tour to the extremely remote Indigenous community of Lajamanu in the Tanami Desert brought together the creative skills of visual artist Tim Newth and dance artist Sarah Calver. David McMicken joined the mix in 1992 as the Community Dance Officer at Brown's Mart Community Arts network. Together they forged a uniquely Northern Territorian performing arts company, collaborating with local community and cultural groups. Taking on the name Tracks in 1994, the dance company was born out of the community dance program.

Adopting a new language for speaking about 'dance' led to mainstream performances with casts representing diverse cultural backgrounds and ages, exploring life as they experienced it, often from living in two or more cultures.

<http://ausdance.org.au/articles/details/tracks-dance-company>

## Curriculum Guidelines

One of the cross-curriculum priorities of the National Curriculum is to incorporate learnings about Indigenous peoples across a range of learning areas at all levels:

*The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority provides the opportunity for all young Australians to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, deep knowledge traditions and holistic world views. This knowledge and understanding will enrich all learners' ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia through a deepening knowledge and connection with the world's oldest continuous living culture.*

*One of the key concepts highlights the special connection to Country/Place by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and celebrates the unique belief systems that connect people physically and spiritually to Country/Place*

[http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/cross\\_curriculum\\_priorities.html](http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/cross_curriculum_priorities.html)





As an exemplar of this key concept, *Milpirri* would be an excellent film to show to upper primary, middle, senior and tertiary students of:

- SOSE/HSIE — change and continuity, geography and environmental studies
- Australian Studies — the diversity of cultures and communities
- Culture and Society — entering into the life and language of another culture
- Indigenous Studies — developing an appreciation of the complex and varied worlds of Australia’s Indigenous people
- Arts subjects including performance and dance — observing how communities can come together through creative expression of stories, made more accessible to a wider audience through a range of technologies, old and new.

Teachers could draw from the material and activities in this guide that would best suit their students in the appropriate curriculum area. Some of the underlying ideas may be quite difficult to grasp fully but the *Milpirri* experience shown in this documentary is certainly worth sharing.

Wanta believes that we cannot but be connected to a country if we live there. Individuals may not think they have a connection, but Wanta suggests that perhaps they simply do not recognise their connecton. “Country has a habit of teaching us about ourselves”, says Wanta at the beginning of the film. Wanta believes that, “This is not a black or white thing.” He states in the film, “*Milpirri* is about reminding us all to listen to country.”



While acknowledging the profound connection of indigenous people to country and the urgency to listen and learn Warlpiri stories, Wanta suggests that it is urgent for all who live under the same sky.

### The central questions are:

1. Can the creative way the *Milpirri* event shares Warlpiri knowledge with all Australians, demonstrate and lead to a more creative approach to tackling health, education, etc.? An approach that draws from Warlpiri knowledge and *Kardiya* knowledge, and has both black and white working together?
2. Why is the expression of culture and ceremony so important for us all?
3. How does the *Milpirri* experience as it is shown in this documentary demonstrate an important way forward in bringing people together?

## Why Milpirri?

Most non-Indigenous Australians know very little about the realities of life for many Indigenous people, especially those who live in remote communities in central and northern Australia. Media reports tend to present depressing images of dysfunctional communities beset by massive health, education and employment problems. However, as the extraordinary variety and styles of recent films and television dramas show us, there are many stories to be enjoyed that provide a rich understanding of different communities and individuals, activities, artistic enterprises and approaches to living well, by and about Indigenous Australians.

As few non-Indigenous Australians recognise a spiritual sense of kinship with the land, something that lies at the heart of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture — ‘belonging to’ country — many aspects of Indigenous culture can be difficult to understand. This is the case with most deeply felt belief systems.

Our own background and cultural beliefs make it challenging to understand another culture fully. Bringing cultures together is like the hot air meeting the cold air in the Milpirri clouds, there can be thunder and lightning. But as Wanta says, “When you have one home, you are stuck with each other. It’s about how we put our ‘taste’ to the unknown. It’s like the Warlpiri word *wunguwarnu*, which can mean ‘everyone is not a secret’.”

- Do all cultures find it hard to understand or ‘get along’ with other cultures?
- Is the Warlpiri word, *wunguwarnu* an example of the potential for cross-cultural understanding / empathy?
- How many language groups existed in Australia before colonisation? How did they co-exist?

This program offers a picture of the staging of a complex cross-cultural ceremony, but the ideas behind Milpirri embody many common themes about reconciliation, conflict resolution, re-birth, growth, seasonal change, community, celebration, memory, continuity and respect for the world we live in. These ideas make it accessible to an audience who do not live in a small community on the edge of the Tanami Desert. The integration of new technologies and



their use in recording and broadcasting Warlpiri culture to a broader community is particularly interesting — the laptop and the clapsticks talking to each other as the sound recordist and the camera operators commit this spectacular ceremony to film to create a vibrant celebration of change and re-birth.

Sub-titles are provided to convey meaning and to emphasise the careful choice of words. But this is also a film about the coming together of people to celebrate their culture and identity in visual ways. It has some very interesting things to say and show about what is ‘lost in translation’ and acknowledges the very real difficulties of translating terms and ideas from one language to another.

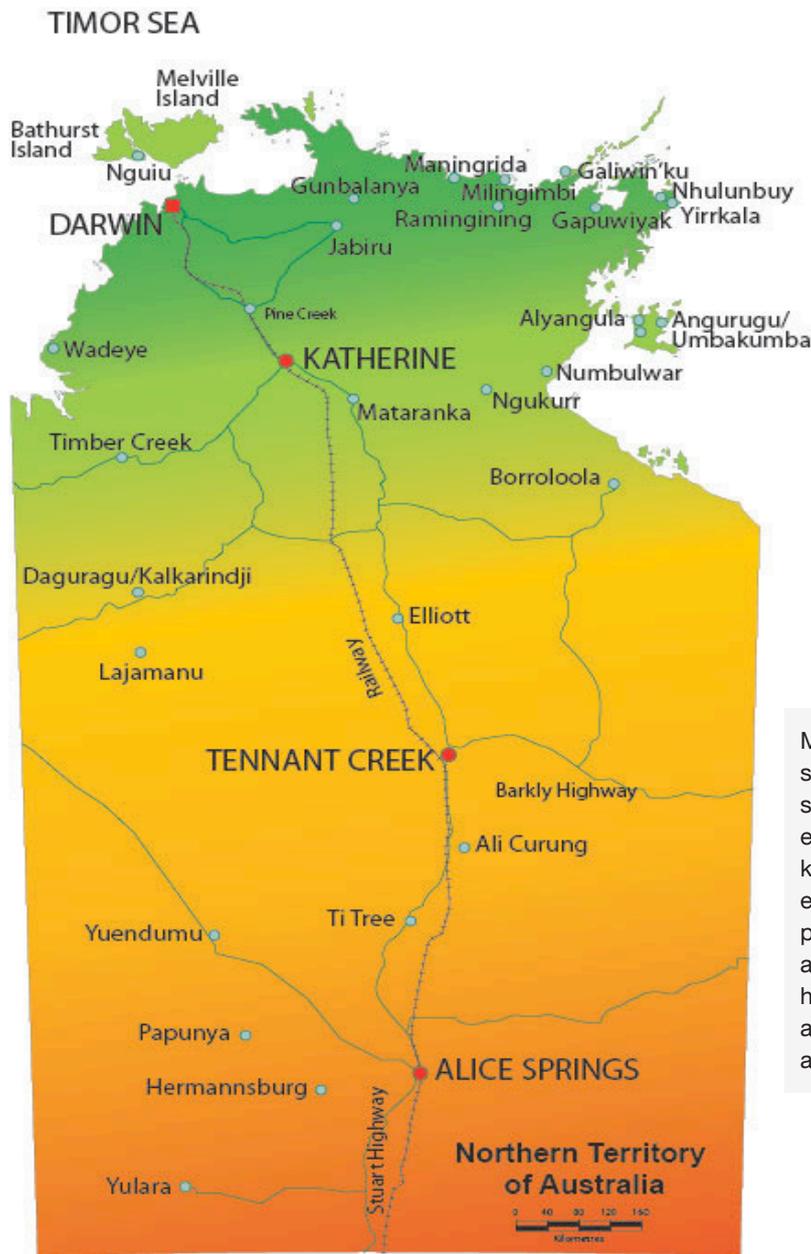
The makers of the film — Wanta Jampijinpa, Stewart Carter and Cath South — are passionate about showing all Australians the importance of understanding and respecting other cultures; of realizing that unless we all start to listen to the land we live on and all our neighbours, we are all at risk of losing our identity.





## Pre-viewing questions for discussion

1. What does 'home' mean to you?
2. Do you have a strong attachment to any particular place — either in Australia or somewhere else such as your family's homeland?
3. What are some of the religion-based ceremonies celebrated in your family?
4. What are some of the non-religion-based occasions that your family celebrate and/or take part in? Are they sporting events such as The Melbourne Cup, public holidays such as The Queen's Birthday, Labour Day, Anzac Day, Australia Day or cultural and arts festivals such as the literary, film, music and cultural festivals held annually in most Australian states? What is being celebrated at each of these festivals and what do these occasions have to do with the life of your family, friends and community?
5. Is it either possible or desirable to somehow shelter and protect people from many of the more damaging aspects and practices introduced by white society, e.g. drugs, including alcohol and tobacco, fast foods, diseases probably unknown before white settlement?
6. Share your knowledge of 'The Intervention' of the Federal Government into some Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory? (You may need to do some online research for this task) What are these programs designed to address?  
  
NB Some of the imposed rules brought in during the Intervention were already in place in Lajamanu. For example Lajamanu was a 'dry' community before 'The Intervention', the community had already decided that this was their best approach.
7. Are solutions to our challenges and difficulties more effective when they are imposed from outside, or when they come from us?
8. What do you think is the most important step to be taken in achieving harmonious and respectful relations between all the different groups of people living in Australia today?
9. What particular difficulties might there be in relation to health, education and employment for people living in remote places in Australia?
10. What advantages might there be for people living in remote communities, especially in regard to their relationships with each other and with country?



Map of the Northern Territory, showing where Lajamanu is situated south-west of Katherine and approximately 650 kms south of Darwin on the edge of the Tanami Desert. The population is believed to be around 1000–1200. Lajamanu has a school, a health centre, an art centre, a store and an all-weather airstrip.

11. How would you explain the idea of ‘identity’ to someone else? What parts of your background and past history make up your identity? Where do you feel you belong?
12. Discuss the meaning of the following words and what they are used to refer to in an English-speaking world – culture, ceremony, performance, ritual, identity and country.
13. How can non-Indigenous people assist/support Indigenous people to retain their culture and promote the practice of that culture?
14. What benefits are there for Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in retaining Indigenous cultures?

- What positives and negatives might there be for people living in a place such as Lajamanu and other remote towns where great distances exist between the small and larger towns such as Tennant Creek, Katherine and cities like Darwin?

## Watching the film

As you watch this film, make brief notes using Table 1 about who takes part in the Milpirri event and what each group or individual’s role is – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, old and young, children and elders, musicians and technicians. After watching the film, share your views about the different elements of the ceremony.

Research the climate and topography of the area of the Northern Territory where Lajamanu is located.

Table 1

MILPIRRI — WINDS OF CHANGE	
GROUP OR INDIVIDUALS	ROLE IN DEVELOPING MILPIRRI
The Women of Milpirri	
Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick	
Tim	
The music making Men of Milpirri	
The young people of Lajamanu	
The community Elders	
Tracks Dance Company	
Caleb	
Doi	
Others?	

## Early scenes

*For thousands of years the country has been teaching us.  
Country has a habit of teaching us about ourselves*

— Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick

- Why do you think the filmmakers chose to have Wanta speaking about the power of country outside Australia's Parliament House in Canberra?
- What does the theme of this most recent Milpirri — 'Pulyaranyi' — mean?
- What sounds will be part of the women's songlines?
- How does Wanta's account of what happened following the suicide of a young man of the community illustrate something of the metaphor behind Milpirri?

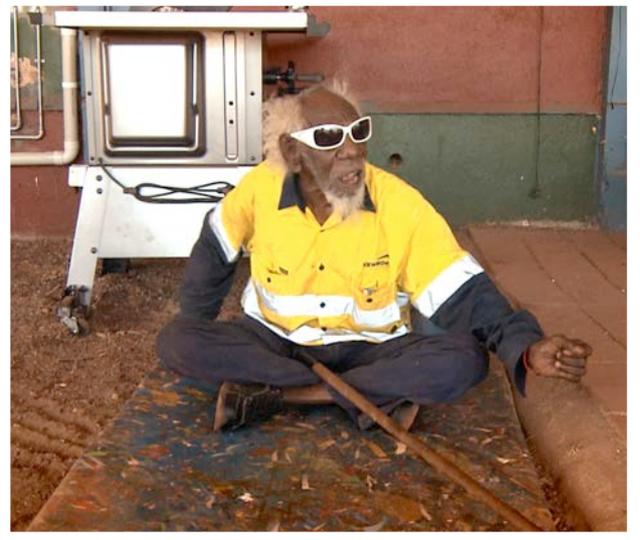
NB SHORT SEGMENT AVAILABLE — *Milpirri* Clouds

## Creating Milpirri

*You learn a lot if you share the skill of unknowing*

— Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick

- How are Tim and David from Tracks Dance Company an important part of the Milpirri biennial production which began in 2005?
- How do Tim and David relate to the Lajamanu people?
- What does Caleb, one of the earliest of the community dancers, contribute to the new performances?
- What do the four colours for the main groups of performers stand for in Warlpiri culture?
- What do the birdcalls of the women represent in the natural cycle? How is the emu's last message to human beings an important part of Milpirri?



- Who cooperates in remaking the *kurlumpurrungu* (an instrument from a lost ceremony)?
- Why is it important to modify some traditional dances for a Milpirri audience?
- We see Tim touching up Gladys's canvas, one of the Milpirri 'back drops' in the Indigenous style. All the Milpirri banners were painted by *Kardiya* people under the direction of Tim and with permission of the owners of the designs. Do you think this is an OK thing to do? Why or why not? What does Tim say about why he is doing this?
- What does Wanta mean when he says, "It is not about changing one another, it is about adjusting to one another"?
- Why is it important that the whole community come together to perform the Milpirri dances, songs and ceremonies?
- Listen to Wanta's passionate words about the importance of cooperative creativity as a way to solve problems and accept differences — to come together.

*Milpirri is ongoing, it never stops. That's why the two moieties are part of the Milky Way so you can see the whole rotation is not going to stop there, no, it's moving all the time. That performance is just a reminder that all these things are ongoing. All these problems going to come and they are going to go. All the good things are going to come, and the good things are going to go. Just be ready for it...that's all. And start being creative, like the performance, trying to be creative, to work things in a community level.*

*We must make health this way. We must make school this way.*

— WANTA JAMPIJINPA PATRICK



- What kind of advice is embodied in the notion of *pulya-ranyi* — slowing down? Is this idea relevant to all races and cultures? Look up the lyrics of Pete Seeger’s 1960s song ‘Turn, turn, turn ... to everything there is a season’ whose words were largely taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible. How do some of these ideas mesh with Milpirri?
- How do we know from the film of this event that it was something that animated, entertained, engaged and inspired the whole community of people, both participants and audience?

## The Warlpiri people and their world

- How did the forced movement in 1948 of people far from their homeland to Hooker Creek (now called Lajamanu) damage their *ngurra-kurlu* (the feeling of being at home within yourself)?
- What does Wanta mean when he says, “Nowadays our people are afraid to rediscover their full potential,”?
- What are your impressions of the country of Lajamanu and the surrounding area? How different (or similar) is it to the place where you live?
- What are some of the things the people want to have control over in how they live their lives? In what ways is local control important in small communities?
- ‘Fast talk is fast food...and that’s not good for you’ — Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick

What is Wanta suggesting is important if outsiders are to properly understand the Warlpiri way?

- How has the bullock traffic at the waterhole damaged the flow of water without completely stopping it, even in dry seasons?
- How can the young people today understand the meaning of important ceremonies like *Jardawarnpa*?
- How does the summoning of the four winds to come together to fuel the fire and flush out the kangaroo relate to the underlying idea of this Milpirri?
- Why does the dying off of a generation of older people make it imperative to ensure that stories, ceremonies and customs are passed on to the younger people? How do we know and remember traditional customs from our various cultures?
- ‘If we deny our only home, we deny our identity. We will become homeless in our own home. Milpirri reminds us our country is one *ngurra*, one home. This is just one of the stories of this country.’ — Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick.

In what way were the Walpiri people of Lajamanu denied their home? What impact has this had on the people of Lajamanu?

What do you think is the most important lesson we can take from the preparations and performance of Milpirri?



## The Coat of Arms

Reproducing the Australian Coat of Arms without written permission is not allowed. By entering 'Australian Coat of Arms' in your browser, you will be able to see a number of images of this symbol of Australian Government. States and Territories have their own variants of the Coat of Arms.

Australia's Coat of Arms with the emu and the kangaroo holding up the central shield means different things to different people. It is not simply a symbol of the federation of the states and territories into a Commonwealth but clearly has other connotations as a national symbol.

One of the elders in Lajamanu says that for Indigenous people the emu represents a strong leader and the kangaroo represents the Law, while another man also suggests that for *Kardiya* (white people) the two animals represent 'progress, bulldozing your way forward'. It has often been claimed that the emu and the kangaroo were chosen because neither animal can move backward, only forward - i.e. progress. Essentially, the emu and the kangaroo are unique Australian animals, strong enough to uphold the shield.

- Did the designers of the shield know what the symbols meant for Warlpiri people? why?
- What does the Coat of Arms mean to you?
- How would we all view the Australian Coat of Arms if we saw the Emu as Teacher, the Kangaroo as the Law Keeper and the shield as representing our moral compass?

NB Wanta would say that country talked to the designers of the Coat of Arms and made them design it this way. Country ensured that the Emu, the representative of Teaching and the Kangaroo the representative of Law were included in the design. The older Warlpiri man looking at the design, says in amazement, "This one is a *Kardiya* (non-aboriginal) design, but it belongs to all of us."

NB SHORT SEGMENT AVAILABLE – Australian Coat of Arms

## Languages, words, meanings

Of 250 Indigenous languages believed to be spoken in 1788, there are now thought to be fewer than 20 still in regular use today. The mother tongue of 50,000 people in Australia is believed to be an Aboriginal language. Some of these languages include people who speak Yolngu – 6,000, Arrernte – 3,000 and Warlpiri – 3,000. For further information about Indigenous languages see <<http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/aboriginal-languages/>>.

As English is the language used in schools for teaching, many younger Indigenous Australians usually speak some English. In addition, the spread of media – especially television and advertising – has made English one of the three most often used languages in many parts of the world along with Mandarin Chinese and Spanish.

As referred to in this documentary, the teaching of a community language in schools, such as Warlpiri, is very much dependent on government policy at the time and the availability of native speakers to teach the community language. If languages are not spoken and used for spoken communication, they die out and often disappear. Warlpiri has been used to teach pupils at the Lajamanu school where it is the main community language. Schools teaching students in their own language and English are sometimes called 'Two-way schools'. If you were not allowed to use the language of your family, what value would you give to that language and culture? Would it be difficult to understand your own culture if you no longer understood your language?

What does the United Nations say about the rights of Indigenous people to learn their language and culture? <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>>

NB SHORT SEGMENT AVAILABLE – Language / Translation



## Translation

Translations are useful to let people develop some understanding of another culture. Sometimes translations are only approximations as the concept they are translating is an integral and perhaps unique aspect of that culture.

- As you watch this film, think about what is often lost in translation. For instance, can humour, tone, irony, emphasis and word weight be retained in translation?
- Can words sometimes be too complex for brief, succinct translation into another culture?
- The word *milpirri* means a particular type of cloud. By the end of the film what other meanings can be read into the word?

Wanta explains that all language translation requires a level of cultural understanding. Some translations can smother the real meaning, distort it and limit it. Wanta suggests that we need to learn about the other culture to find the meaning and understanding of their words and phrases.

- What happens to many cultures when their language for telling stories, naming and valuing things dies out? How do different communities record and pass on their culture?

Some words used in this documentary and their approximate translations:

Yapa — Warlpiri word for Indigenous

Kardiya — Warlpiri word for non-Indigenous

Milpirri — literally the huge impressive clouds that form over the Tanami Desert just before the rainy season. The event that shares this name is a way to show a little bit of a number of ceremonies. They represent the meeting of opposites, the coming together of hot and cold air and the life producing rain the clouds then produce.

Five pillars of Warlpiri society

Ngurra – home

Kurrawarri — the law (the lore of the land)

Jaru – language

Nyinya warlalja — skin/family

Manyuwana — ceremony

Create a diagram with *ngurra* as the central point and the other pillars of Warlpiri society radiating out from the centre like spokes in a wheel.

NB SHORT SEGMENT AVAILABLE – *Ngurra Kurlu*

Pulyaranyi — the winds of change that stoke the fires



*Milpirri* asks the question: What does it mean to be an Australian?

Would you like to understand and live in the homeland of the kangaroo?

Are you prepared to learn the ways of the emu?

Who will teach us to soar like the wedge-tail eagle?

This 2012 performance celebrates Pulyaranyi. It is informed by ceremony connected to *Pulyaranyi*, the winds of change that stoke the fire. Two hunters from the west lit a fire attempting to flush out kangaroo for food. They were trying to get it to move, but it kept burning straight up, and was slow to consume the grass around it. They asked the wind to help. First they asked the East wind, but it was not strong enough. Then they asked North, then West, then South. Not strong enough, but together they were really strong, able to steer it in the right direction.

*Pulya* (Slow) – *Ranyi* (to move) or 'windless'. It speaks about being stuck in one place, not moving. Opposing forces can cause a standstill, not letting us get anywhere. We need to stir things up.

Pulyaranyi is a call to action. We have talked, we have listened; now we need to act. It is time to celebrate what it means to be living on this country – to be Australian.

'Fire is the glow of life. The four winds – from north, south, east, and west – control the fire, control us. Milpirri is the story that will ignite the fire of who we are.' - Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick

<http://tracksdance.com.au/milpirri-2012-pulyaranyi>

Yawulyu — women's songlines, earth songs

Jukurpa — totem story; Jangala's mother's *Jukurpa* is the *watuwa*.



## Songlines

A songline is a path across the country which marks the route followed by creator-beings during the Dreaming. Songlines are recorded in traditional songs, stories, dance, and painting. One of Central Australia's oldest intact songlines is called the Ngintaka, or Perentie Lizard, dreaming.

In his 1987 book *The Songlines*, British novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin describes the songlines as... *the labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as 'Dreaming-tracks' or 'Songlines'; to the Aboriginals as the 'Footprints of the Ancestors' or the 'Way of the Law'.*

*Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the name of everything that crossed their path - birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes - and so singing the world into existence.*

Songlines are central to the identity of Indigenous people but it would take many words to explain the complexity of the role they play in Indigenous life.

## Country

A term used by Aboriginal people to refer to the land to which they belong and their place of Dreaming. Aboriginal language use of the word 'country' is much broader and more complex than the way the word is used to character-

ise bushland or undeveloped land in standard Australian English.

Wanta says near the beginning of the film, "I was born in a women's camp just down this way. Yuwayi – yes. My mother felt that she got something there, and that was me. They say this country offered her me."

As Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick says about Milpirri — 'this is more than a performance, this is to bring people home... this is not about religion, this is all about country. If you live in this country, it feels really good if you know this country. 'G'day country', we should acknowledge each other in this way.'

Some words and their meaning can be hard for non-Indigenous people to grasp, just as some expressions and words English speakers use don't make much sense to many Indigenous Australians. For example, what can '*nyinya nyinya warlalja* —skin/family' mean in the world of the Warlpiri? In this film, when Jangala collects *Watuwa* (the grasses to be part of the Milpirri dances) he is with his mother again. *Watuwa* is a plant that has the skin name *Napangardi* which means that it has the same skin name as his mother. For Jangala it IS his mother.

See <http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/aboriginal-kinship> for interesting information about kinship and skin names.

In this documentary, some of the white people, like Tim, who work in the community, have 'skin names'. 'David is a *Japaljarri* and Tim is a *Jampijinpa*'. How can this be? Here is one explanation from the Central Land Council website referenced here.



*Early contact relationships with non-Aboriginal people were rather uncomfortable for Aboriginal people since it was unheard of for a person not to be ‘something’ (i.e. not to have a skin classification).*

*Thus the practice emerged of non-Aboriginal being given skin names. Some non-Aboriginal people have mistakenly believed that this is a sign of acceptance by the people. It is truer to say that it is a mechanism Aboriginal people have employed to make their dealings with non-Aboriginal more comfortable for themselves.*

Skin name as earth/country name, helps denote physical place on the map, as well as the “relationship” map. With the skin name you can “make your mark”, state your relationship, accept your relationship obligations and behave accordingly.

In the *Milpirri* documentary, Wanta says, “If people do not know their skin name, we find it for them.” Wanta has said, “Country gives everyone a skin name, they just may not have found it yet.”

Why is Wanta particular about using the word ‘find’?

Skin names relate people to each other AND everything around them: plants, animals, places, stars, everything.

NB SHORT SEGMENT AVAILABLE – Skin Names

When most non-indigenous people talk about walking in the country or going for a holiday in the country or the countryside, they are expressing a different view of ‘country’ to that of Indigenous Australians who talk about being

‘on country’, ‘listening to country’, ‘being part of country’, having a strong connection with their own country where their family comes from originally.

Wanta says, “...all cultures need to be respected. Not saying one culture is better than this culture, or that culture. This one is the one that can open your eyes. But the best thing is knowing what you are standing on.”

Why does Wanta emphasise, “..knowing what you are standing on”?

“These are desperate times for Warlpiri people,” and Wanta believes these are desperate times for everyone living in Australia if we do not take time to learn from the country and from Australian Indigenous culture.

“We risk losing thousands of years of this country’s identity.”

‘Dreaming’ – or *Jukurrpa*

The word ‘dreaming’ for white people means something more like ‘an aspiration’ or what we do when sleeping. ‘The Dreaming’ for Indigenous Australians, or *Jukurrpa* for Warlpiri people refers to creation and an acknowledgement of the ancestors’ role in creation.

In the late 19th century Frank Gillen and Baldwin Spencer translated the Arrrente (and others’) word ‘Alcheringa’ to the English word ‘Dreamtime’. It has since been recognised as an inadequate translation. What other English word or words, may be a better way to translate the Warlpiri word *Jukurrpa* into English?



- If a particular tree was part of your identity, how hard would it be to see it damaged or cut down?
- If a rock formation had cultural significance to you and your community, how would you feel if people walked all over it and took photos of it?
- If an animal, bird or fish was your brother or sister, how would you consider it in relation to your own identity?
- Explain the fundamental difference between Indigenous and European views about land and land ownership. Does your family own land or land and property? Do they have 'title' to the land? What does 'land ownership' mean to Indigenous Australians or is this simply the wrong term to use? What is 'native title'?
- Wanta says, "We do not cultivate land, land cultivates us." What does he mean by this?
- If your family's place of birth was taken over and developed for mining, how would you feel?
- If white people make paintings employing similar styles, symbols, colours and brushwork that are often seen in Indigenous paintings, is this reasonable appropriation (borrowing or re-using) of other people's images and distinctive styles?

(Note: in this documentary we see a non-Indigenous man touching up a backdrop designed by a woman painter in the community, presumably with her permission. In fact the entire painting was created by the team, first drawn by Gladys Napanagardi Tasman, redrawn by Tim Newth on the canvas to match the dimensions of other designs,

approved by Gladys, and then painted by various *Kardiya* people. The idea of touching up designs, or renewing, or 'making flash' is not new. The idea of many people involved in making the design is not new. As long as the *jukurpa* is 'right'.)

## Ceremonies

*Ceremonies are educational and the equivalent of the high learning that is achieved in universities.* — Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick

How is being part of a ceremony the equivalent of attending university?

*Milpirri* is an important concept from Warlpiri culture. The meeting of the hot and cold air to form the rain clouds, bringing differences together creates lightning and thunder that produces the rain that follows. In bringing cultures together, positive relationships and deep understanding can take place, but only over time (*pulyaranyi*).

There are many matters to consider when working with and living with another culture or community.

- *Milpirri* does not just represent traditional ceremonies. How does it incorporate contemporary music and dance in ways that involve all members of the community — young and old, men and women?
- What are some of the contemporary theatrical dance moves that Tracks dance company artists bring to this performance?



- What are some of the concerns of the older community members about what is happening to ceremonies? Explain what community Elder Japanangka means when he says, “Today we are throwing away the Law. *Kardiya* (non-aboriginal) are taking it away from us. We get together without doing a proper sorry ceremony; today it is nothing.”
- How do the regular ceremonial practices of different religions and cultures strengthen people’s sense of belonging and the value of continuity?
- Wanta says “Language, relationships, law and land all suffer without our ceremonies.” What does Wanta mean? Refer to the image of *ngurra kurlu*.
- Do you think traditions and ceremonies need to be re-invented or re-worked to retain their meaning for younger generations?
- Should some of the Warlpiri people’s sacred ceremonies be part of a performance like Milpirri that has at its heart truths about the history and culture of a people with a long history? How might sharing some of these stories in a public ceremony be hard for many community members to accept?
- Do some non-Indigenous Australians have secret ceremonies that are only revealed to adherents after initiation ceremonies?
- What does Wanta hope will be achieved by showing a ‘taste’ of ceremonies?
- How much do Australians know about the funeral and burial rites of all the different religious groups in Australia — Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Indigenous Australians?
- What ceremonies are chosen by different groups to express their sorrow at the death of family or friends and their belief in some kind of afterlife? What memorials do different societies and cultures create?
- Describe a ceremonial occasion that you have attended. What were some of the elements of the ceremony and celebration or commemoration that are often part of many ceremonies?
- “Our ceremonies don’t fit into European schedules.” If your family were not allowed to hold a funeral the way you wanted to, how would that impact on you and your family?

What is the essential difference between a performance and a ceremony?



“Maybe questions they will ask later. But that’s if they are hungry for that knowledge. That continuous feeding for that knowledge. It’s up to them to come back.”



## Looking after country

*Our libraries exist within the country.*

*We don't look after country, country looks after us. — Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick*

Many people today are concerned that human activity is causing massive and potentially irreversible changes to the world's climate. How well are many of us 'looking after country so it can look after us'?

- In what ways have many Indigenous peoples all over the world tended to live much more sustainably with the land, water and natural resources? Give some examples of people living within what is available for their survival.
- In what ways have those who have colonised societies all over the world tended to use the resources of land and water? What are the main reasons for 'using' the land and waters for our benefit?
- How is knowledge of the country an important part of conserving valuable natural resources?

- What does it mean in practice to respect the country we all live on?
- Apart from sustainable living what other reasons do indigenous people have to look after country?
- "Country has a way of teaching us about ourselves." The Australian land and environment are very different to England. Did any of the colonisers listen to the country? Do people on the land, farmers, miners etc. listen to country now?



## References and Resources

Wanta Jampijinpa talks about the four elements — earth, wind, fire and water: <<http://www.bcsact.com.au/latest-news/wintaru-a-short-film-and-interview-with-wanta-jampijinpa/>>

A paper co-written by Wanta Jampijinpa about what *Ngurra-kurlu* (the home within) means in Warlpiri culture and life: <<http://www.nintione.com.au/resource/DKCRC-Report-41-Ngurra-kurlu.pdf>>

A brief account of the geography and population of Lajamanu <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajamanu,\\_Northern\\_Territory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lajamanu,_Northern_Territory)>

An informative community profile about Lajamanu from the Remote Area Health Corps: <[http://www.rahc.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/community\\_profiles/Lajamanu%20Community%20Profile.pdf](http://www.rahc.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/community_profiles/Lajamanu%20Community%20Profile.pdf)>

Information about the town of Lajamanu with a number of photographs: <<http://ozoutback.com.au/Australia/lajamanu/index.html>>

These websites provide information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and beliefs about the world: <<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/spirituality/>> and <<http://www.aboriginalculture.com.au/religion.shtml>>

Information about the Aboriginal languages of Central Australia: <<http://www.clc.org.au/articles/info/aboriginal-languages/>>

Information about Tracks Dance Company: <<http://tracksdance.com.au/>>

Information, photographs and video of Milpirri 2012 (Pulyarani): <<http://tracksdance.com.au/milpirri-2012-pulyaranyi>>

Information and photographs of the Milpirri Banners: <<http://tracksdance.com.au/milpirri-banner-project>>

Information about Tracks Dance Company's artistic relationship with the community of Lajamanu: <<http://www.tracksdance.com.au/lajamanu-tracks-relationship>>

Information and images of the work of an artist from Lajamanu <[http://www.flinders.edu.au/art\\_museum\\_files/Documents/Exhibitions/Research%20notes%20final.pdf](http://www.flinders.edu.au/art_museum_files/Documents/Exhibitions/Research%20notes%20final.pdf)>

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