

Giiir Maaru

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY OCTOBER 2020



Nhingali
Ngiyaningu Garay
Weaving our story



Supporting and inspiring our
next generation of leaders.

On Country Learning

The Gomerai Culture Academy took our 2020 students for a week out on Country, touring across Coonabarabran, Pilliga, Narrabri and Kaputar, and visiting a number of really special places as we built our understanding of the land and stories from across the region.

Sites included on the tour were Burra Bee Dee Mission at Coonabarabran, the Sandstone Caves in Pilliga National Park, Pilliga Discovery Centre and Bore Baths, Dandry Gorge, White Gums Lookout, Tara Caves, Milroy Observatory, Sawn Rocks, Mount Kaputar and Deriah Aboriginal Area – contributing to a very busy week exploring the cultural riches and history of the region and its people.

Among the many highlights for students was a visit to Burra Bee Dee Mission where they heard the inspirational story of Gomerai

matriarch Mary Jane Cain. Mary Jane Cain was born in 1844 and became a widely recognised leader and Aboriginal rights activist, who fought for the rights of Aboriginal communities across the pre-colonial to post-colonial eras in Australia. She was also instrumental in recording Gomerai language and local plants for future generations. The GCA students agreed that her story and the history of Burra Bee Dee should be taught and celebrated nationally. The students learned that the qualities that lived inside leaders like Mary Jane Cain, live inside them too.

An introduction to Tara Caves at the Warrumbungles National Park (WNP) was provided by Senior Leader for the WNP, Jillian Norton. Jillian talked about the importance of the Warrumbungles not only to Gomerai people but also neighbouring Wailwan and Wiradjuri people and answered questions from the students and staff.



At Tara Caves the girls sat and weaved, learning weaving songs as the boys walked up the mountain. The boys said they felt a sense of connection that filled them with strength as they took in their surroundings.

Students were also able to visit an Aboriginal Burial Ground which was a part of a recent repatriation led by Gomerai man Steve Booby from the Office of Environment and Heritage at Narrabri. Students learned from Steve about the importance of following cultural protocols and how they impact the repatriation process. Steve also led the students on a walk to Sawn Rocks where he told a story of how the rocks were created and what that story means to Gomerai people.

Thank you to all the people and communities that support our journey with a special mention to Brett Ashby, Jillian Norton and Steven Booby.



MENTORING



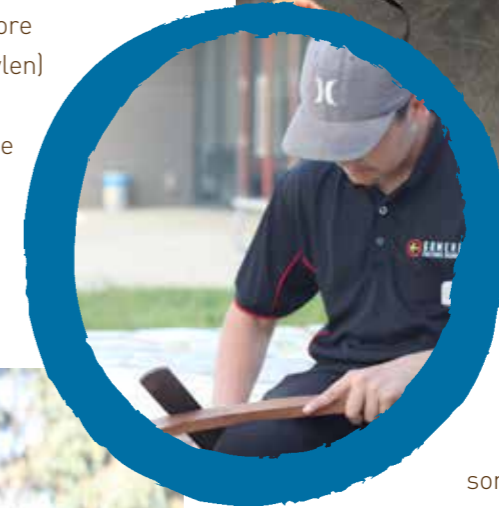
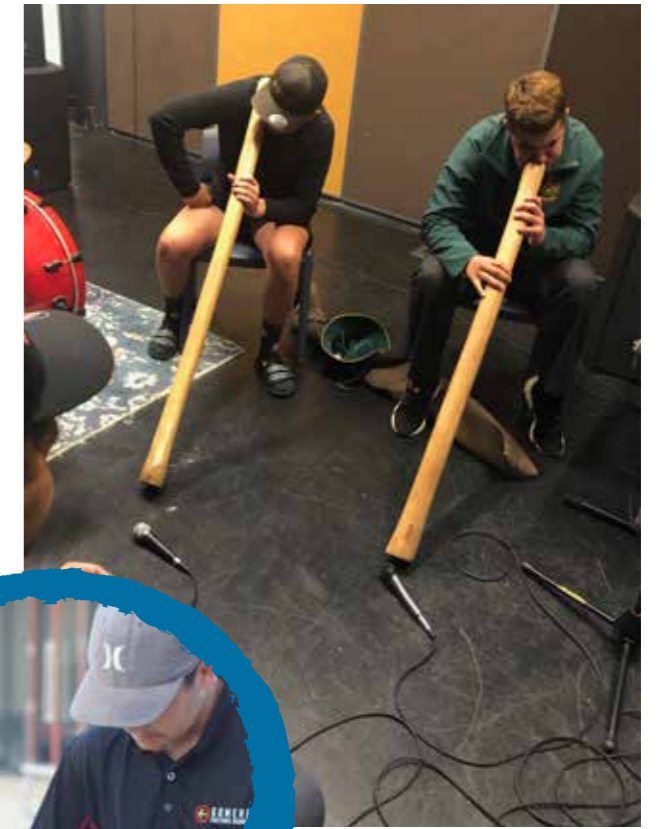
All students are continuing to progress through their individual Cultural Learning Plans with the help of their mentors. We are proud to say that although COVID-19 restrictions have significantly affected our activities this year, students have maintained a high level of attendance throughout. Students' personal growth has also been noticed by many people including the students' parents, school staff and family members, who have provided a range of positive feedback.

The girls have worked diligently with their Cultural Mentors from Yinarr Maramali to complete the final touches on their pieces for the Yinarr Maramali Exhibition at the Tamworth Regional Gallery. A range of cultural practices were featured within the exhibition including painting (Shakayla), dance skirts (Aaliyah and Thora), and woven coolamons and dilly bags (Vienna, Wunda and Jesse).



As part of their mentoring, the girls were invited to be a part of the installation of the exhibition and were shown what goes on behind the scenes. A tour of the exhibition, led by Yinarr Maramali Co-Director and Artist Amy Hammond provided in-depth access to cultural stories, artistic processes and an intimate space for the girls to reflect with other women and ask any questions. This was first time that the students had seen their artwork installed, and they enjoyed seeing their names up on the walls of the exhibition. The energy in the gallery was electric and the pride of the girls was evident by the smiles on their faces.

The boys are working on their consistency as they learn to play the yidaki, understand more about the process of woodcarving (Jaylen) and build their repertoire of Gomeroi songs and dance (Jerra and Kylan). The boys have been reminded about the importance of being curious and are encouraged to try new approaches and techniques to develop their skills.



Jerra and Kylan are now in the process of creating their own dances and have been challenged to find something meaningful to them and show their respect by honouring it with a dance. Both boys are on track to have their dances ready to be performed and showcased at the Graduation Ceremony at the end of the year.

It has been amazing to see the boys open up and to witness their confidence levels increase over the past 3 terms. We can also see how they are applying this new fearlessness in their everyday life.



EXHIBITIONS



Over the past three-years, GCA students have been supported to connect to Country, learn stories and create some amazing pieces of work. These include some of the individual pieces that students have completed in mentoring, as well as those they have contributed to with many others from across the region. All of this learning has been highlighted by being included in two large exhibitions:

Tension(s) 2020 – Tamworth Textile Triennial and *Nhingali Nginyangu Garay*.

Tension(s) 2020 – Tamworth Textiles Triennial is a curated, joint exhibition, and features the woven sculpture Warrabah (short neck turtle), created in 2018 by GCA students and alumni as part of

Yinarr Maramali’s major community arts project. The girls joined over 100 other Gomeri women from a number of different communities across the region to create Warrabah which is close to 2 metres long and made from lomandra and water vine.

Being chosen to be a part of *Tension(s) 2020*, the 3rd Tamworth textiles triennial, curated by Vic McEwan, means that Warrabah will be going on a national tour for the next 2.5 years. Touring venues in its first year will include Tamworth Regional Gallery, Mosman Art Gallery, Manning Regional Gallery, Tweed Regional Gallery and ArtSpace Mackay.



↑ Waanda Ngingalaanha Dhigarragal Shakayla Spearim 2020



← Naturally dyed raffia and kurrajong skirts: Olivia Flett 2018, Thora Flett 2020, Aaliyah Morley 2020, Shakayla Spearim 2020.

→ Yinarr and Miray Journey Together Tamia Haines 2019.

↓ My GCA Journey Sheena Rutley 2018



Yinarr Maramali has also coordinated a second exhibition - **Nhingali Nginyangu Garay (Weaving our Story)**, which features works developed over three years of GCA mentoring, alongside other original works of Yinarr Maramali’s member artists. *Nhingali Nginyangu Garay* has been an opportunity for students to have the experience of preparing for, installing, and exhibiting their own artworks and being recognised

for their work. This opportunity has connected students to a community of women and given them a sense of their place in carrying forward the world’s oldest living culture. This exhibition will also go on tour across the region.



← Woven Raffia and Lomandra baskets, coolamons, and dilly bags: J-Lee Nash 2018, Wunda Williams 2020, Vienna Edwards 2020, Jesse Deaves 2020, April Edser 2019, Jorja Irwin 2018, Ebony Naden 2018, Shakayla Spearim 2020.

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 Joblink Plus and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA).

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