

Giiirr Maaruu

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER FROM GOMEROI CULTURE ACADEMY APRIL 2021



bayaal
bayanguurr
burrulaabaa
next young leaders



GOMEROI
CULTURE ACADEMY

Supporting and inspiring our
next generation of leaders.

Welcoming Ceremony



The Gomerai Culture Academy was pleased to welcome our fourth annual intake of students in early 2021.

In February, students were invited to attend a Welcoming Ceremony, supported by their families, school staff and members of the community. The event was held at Tamworth Youthie, with a

capacity audience eagerly anticipating the announcement of successful applicants from a field of 30 young people who applied for the 2021 program.

Eleven young people were welcomed to the 2021 GCA including: Desean Allen, Uche Anyanwu, Jakala Flett, Brendan Irwin, Mackenzie Lett, Violet Nicholson, Talan Oliver, Lachlan Power, Janaya Sampson, Kylie Sullivan and Ivy West.



The students attend four local high schools with the GCA welcoming the return participation of Peel High School, Tamworth High School and McCarthy Catholic College, as well as Carinya Christian School who are joining the GCA for their first year.

Members of the GCA Alumni, Maene Trindall (2018 graduate) and Jeremiah West (2020 graduate), welcomed new students by performing a Gomerai dance and sharing their pride in seeing the GCA family grow.

This was followed by an official welcome from GCA Director, Marc Sutherland, who spoke about the legacy that the young people are stepping into. Marc also provided an overview of the program's purpose and vision, and the way of thinking that drives the GCA.

GCA Co-ordinator Lorrelle Munro then outlined the 2021 calendar of events and the role that Gatherings, Mentoring, and On Country opportunities will play in students' growth. Lorrelle spoke about the importance of mentoring in providing

a pathway to pursue special interests and take advantage of additional opportunities that might arise over the course of the year.

Our guest speaker was J-Lee Nash, a 2019 graduate and GCA Alumni. J-Lee shared her experiences of the program, encouraging new students to

embrace all of the opportunities that the GCA presents and to build strong connections with their fellow students in order to get the most out of the program. J-Lee spoke on behalf of her fellow Alumni, offering her support to new students who she will meet with formally at joint gatherings throughout the year.

Students received their GCA bags which included shirts, jumpers and hats, a Gamilaraay dictionary and other resources to equip them for the year ahead. After the event there were many photo opportunities, with conversations reflecting the anticipation felt for an exciting year of growth and learning.



GATHERINGS



Our first two gatherings for the year were an opportunity for students to build connections with each other, and introduced them to sites near Tamworth, and core cultural principles that will be foundational for the year ahead.

At our first Gathering, GCA staff provided an introduction to Gomeroi language, Gomeroi Country and the importance of following cultural protocols. Students were then introduced to Country through a Smoking Ceremony at the Moonbi 1 site at Daruka. This was a chance to discuss how cultural protocol applies both at sacred sites and within community. We learnt why smoking ceremonies are so important and some of the stories that are connected to the process. Afterwards we



visited the rock art at the site. Standing under the painting sparked a conversation around the way that art is used to share story, and reinforced the core principle that 'Everything has Story'. Understanding the importance of relationships and how we relate to the world around us is a major focus throughout the year, and via Gatherings, students are given the time and experience to help this resonate.

Students heard Burruguu garaygal (Creation Stories) and how these connect to Gomeroi Country and provide us

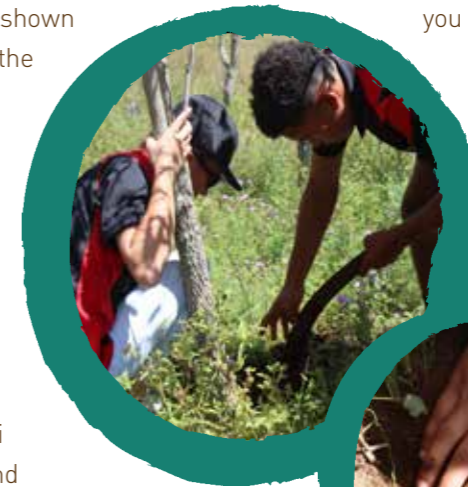


with our place, our connection and our identity. To explore the nature of kinship, students were taken to a site at Moore Creek where they heard a story of Garriya (Rainbow Serpent) and were introduced to Bumbal, his Buyal (mother-in-law). Students were also introduced to Gadibundu (quinine), a powerful bush medicine and were shown how to source the plant and begin the process of making the medicine.

Language has been a major component in both Gatherings. Students were able to hear an audio compilation of Gomeroi people speaking language in the 1960s and 1970s. In the recording they could hear the pronunciation of the word Gomeroi and connect this to the variation and

emphasis on pronunciation across our communities. Students have been supported to learn language to acknowledge Country, have heard language through stories and used it to express Dhiyaan (family) structures. Students have also learnt how to use language for common phrases like, 'where are you at?', 'I am going, see you later' and 'I am hungry/thirsty'.

With six more Gatherings planned for 2021 we are impressed by the growth and passion displayed by all students who are returning home and sharing these stories and learnings with their family and friends.



MENTORING

All students have started developing their Cultural Learning Plans (CLP) where they have outlined their personal goals for the year, and how they wish to focus their time in mentoring.

The boys have spent time learning from cultural mentor Bareki Knox. In their CLP, all of the boys have identified an interest in learning the role that the yidaki plays in Gomeroid culture and becoming confident to play the yidaki in front of others. To start their journey, the boys heard the story of 'Yidaki' and learnt how the story has travelled to Gomeroid country over recent years. They have also begun the process of learning circular breathing. One of the techniques

used to teach circular breathing is to spit water out of the mouth while breathing in. While this started off quite messy, by end of the session the boys had a greater understanding of the technique! The boys have been allocated their own Yidaki to work on the techniques and skills shared by their mentor.

GCA Alumni Cameron Smith (2020 Graduate) joined the boys for one of the mentoring sessions to show them a Yidaki that he had made at home. Cameron shared his experience of mentoring and spoke about the importance of being persistent and staying curious. He said "there is always a way, you just have to figure it out and try new things".



In their CLPs, the girls have identified a goal to better understand the role that weaving plays in Gomeroid culture and to learn the processes needed to weave a basket or dillybag. The girls have been taught to identify different weaving plants and materials, learning their Gomeroid names and the relationships that these plants have with the Gomeroid people and Country within our Gomeroid Kinship System. They are now familiarising themselves with preparing grass for weaving including cutting, splitting and drying techniques.

Although the girls are eager to jump in and start weaving it is important that they follow the process that has been put in place for many generations. The girls have heard and been able to learn Gomeroid weaving stories and spend time on Country.

Embedded across our mentoring session is our strong focus on self-development which is guided by the GCA's overarching cultural framework. Core principles including persistence, curiosity and purpose have already started to shine through as areas of growth during Term 1.



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).

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