ACTIVITY SHEET : 1
For Primary School Students

The Lockhart River Art Gang

The Lockhart River 'Art Gang' are a group of young artists who come from Cape York in far north Queensland. They live in an Aboriginal community called Lockhart River.

The artists started making art at school and now have exhibitions in Australia and overseas. Some of the artists are Rosella Namok, Fiona Omeenyo, Samantha Hobson, Silas Hobson, and Adrian King.

The Lockhart River Art Gang makes art that talks about their country and the stories of the old people, but they do it in what the artists call 'our way', or 'pama way'. Lockhart River people say they are Pama Malnkana - 'people of the sand beach'. They call their country 'Sandbeach country'.

Today, younger people at Lockhart River do not always speak in their original language. Instead, they are likely to speak Lockhart Creole - a mix of local languages and English.

'pama way' = 'our way' 
'para way' = 'whitefella' way

'pama way' = 'our way' = 'Sandbeach way'

Pama Malnkana = 'people of the sand beach'
Sandbeach country

'Country' has special meaning for Aboriginal people as it is not only the place they come from, but also the place their stories are about. 'Country' does not mean a country like Australia or America. 'Country' for an Aboriginal person might mean a place by a river, or a valley, or an area of the sea where they catch fish, turtles and dugong. Their stories might include how that place and those creatures came into being.

The 'country' or traditional homelands of the Lockhart River community stretch from the land beside the beach out into the sea to the Great Barrier Reef.

'Before time' and Quinkan rock art figures

'Before time' is the time that was long ago. Stories about 'Before time' also tell how the world and everything in it - people, animals, plants - came into being.

Ancient rock art found south of Lockhart River near Laura includes pictures of Quinkan spirit figures, known as Quinkans. Quinkan spirits are said to hide in the cracks of rocks and come out at night. People are afraid of them. Other pictures on the rocks show animals, birds and fish. You might see a painting of a kangaroo, flying fox, dingo or crocodile.

Some of the creatures depicted by Aboriginal people are totems. A totem is an animal or other natural being which forms a link for individuals to their land or ancestral beings.

Aboriginal people painted the rock faces with natural earth colours called ochres. Red, orange, yellow and white were some of the colours used.
Fiona Omeenyo and the Quinkans

Artist Fiona Omeenyo’s family once lived in Umpila country at Chester River, near where the Quinkan rock art is found. Fiona Omeenyo’s art looks a bit like the Quinkan rock art paintings.

‘Before time’ and I’wai the crocodile

I’wai the crocodile comes from ‘Before time’. I’wai (say ‘ee’way!’) is a spirit figure. He is also a very big crocodile! But this crocodile has the body of a man.

I’wai is the ‘Big Man’ figure in the Hero Cult creation myth who travels across Sandbeach country in ancestral times creating sites through his activities.

The story of I’wai belongs to all the different people of Sandbeach country.

The white dots on Silas Hobson’s sculpture of Crocodile Man are like the white dots Sandbeach people paint on their legs, arms and face when they perform ceremonial dances.

Sandbeach Country and the Great Barrier Reef

Sandbeach people love fishing. They catch fish, crayfish, dugong and turtles in the clear blue waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

When the Lockhart River Art Gang started making art and learnt how to make prints, they often made pictures of sea creatures.
Outstations

Today many Lockhart River families have camps on their traditional lands. They call these camps ‘outstations’. For them, ‘getting back to country’ is very important. They are getting back to the country of their ancestors.

Printing and painting

Paintings by Rosella Namok and Fiona Omeenyo are a bit like screenprints. The way they make paintings is also like the way the women elders draw in the sand.

The ‘Old Girls’ sit on the beach telling stories (what they call ‘yarning’) and draw in the sand with their fingers. The young artists also draw with their fingers, but they pull their fingers through paint instead of sand.

Rosella Namok and Fiona Omeenyo draw in the wet paint. As they scrape away the wet paint with their fingers or with a tool, a dried layer of paint underneath is revealed.

Printing techniques

When the Lockhart River artists were still at school, they were taught how to make prints such as linocuts and screenprints by a number of artists called ‘printmakers’, who visited Lockhart River.

Their prints included pictures of land and sea animals, such as turtles and dugong, types of fish and birds, crocodiles and other reptiles. The boys were excellent at drawing animals and other creatures with simple lines and patterns.
What is a linocut?

A linocut is made by cutting into a block of lino (linoleum) with a cutting tool.

- the artist uses a sharp tool to cut away parts of the block, leaving on the surface the raised part that is to be the drawing/artwork
- ink is applied to the surface of the block, and paper is pressed against it
- the paper is pulled away, with the printed design now on the paper
- you can make a similar print by using a big potato cut in half!

What is a screenprint?

A screenprint is a stencil process – the artist blocks out areas they do NOT want the ink to cover:

- fine cloth like silk is stretched across a frame to make a screen
- the artist makes a ‘stencil’ (with paper, glue or other material) that the ink will NOT go through
- using a squeegee (a tool with a rubber blade), ink is forced through the screen on to the paper underneath
- different colours are pulled through separately with a new screen made for each colour
- the sheets of paper are dried before a new colour is added

Look at how prints are made

Go to this website and help make prints on your computer screen!
‘What is a print?’ Museum of Modern Art (New York) website @
Lockhart River artists – making art ‘our way’

Prints and paintings by different Lockhart River artists look very different. Some prints and paintings look like pictures of places and things you see in their country, while others look the way the artist has felt with their emotions, when they were happy, angry or sad.

Why do the artists have such different styles?

- the Lockhart River artists are from different language groups (their elders came from different areas of ‘country’, with different language and stories)

- at Lockhart River the art began with the young people rather than with the elders

- unlike other remote Aboriginal communities where the elders are making art based on a lifetime of Aboriginal law, stories and ceremony, at Lockhart River the young people were learning art at the same time as they were learning about their culture

- professional artists from different parts of Australia came to Lockhart River and taught the Lockhart River Art Gang skills for making art; they encouraged them to try new ways of telling their traditional stories in prints, painting and sculpture

- the Lockhart River artists wanted to make art in a style they said was ‘our way’
Activities before visiting the exhibition!

1. Where is Lockhart River?
Find Lockhart River on a map of Australia. Which is further away from
Brisbane – Lockhart River in Cape York or Melbourne in Victoria?

1. _____ Lockhart River _____ 2. _____ Melbourne _____ (circle one)

2. Where did your family come from?
Write down the name of the place or places where your family comes from –
your parents, your grandparents, or even your great-grandparents!

______________________________________________________

Is that place, or are those places, special to you? ________________

Why?

____________________________________________________________

Did your family speak a language other than English?

___________________

If they did, what language did they speak?

__________________________

3. Make a picture!
Make a picture using your favourite colours and in it tell a story about
where you come from. Only put in what is most important. Do you have any
people or animals in your story?
Activities following your visit to the exhibition!

A special place

Make a picture of a place that is special to you. It may be where you live now, or where you used to live. Or it may be where you go on picnics or where you walk your dog. Give your picture a title.

Using layers of paint to make a drawing

- First, think of a design for a painting, using ‘line’ to create a shape.
- Make a painting by first covering the sheet of paper with a bright colour (e.g. yellow, apple green, pink). Leave that colour to dry.
- Then paint a darker colour over the top, all over the first colour.
- While the top layer is still wet, draw in the paint with your fingers (or use a soft plastic scraping tool, or hold a cloth over your finger, or hold a small piece of sponge) so that the bright colour underneath appears as a drawing. You could draw an animal, fish or bird.

Sea creatures and patterns

Paint a picture of a dugong or turtle swimming in the sea. Are any other sea creatures swimming with the dugong or turtle in your painting? What patterns can you make in your picture? Is the sea blue or another colour? Try using contrasting colours.

A picture about feelings

Make a drawing or painting that expresses how you feel about something. Think about how you use colour, line, shapes and brushstrokes to express this feeling. Don’t forget to give your artwork a title!
Recommended texts


Recommended websites

Andrew Baker Art Dealer: http://www.andrew-baker.com/

Hogarth Galleries: http://www.aboriginalartcentres.com/


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**Our Way, Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Lockhart River Activity Sheet**

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**Our Way, Contemporary Aboriginal Art from Lockhart River**
The University of Queensland Art Museum
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Exhibition curator: Dr Sally Butler, Lecturer in the School of English, Media Studies and Art History, The University of Queensland.

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