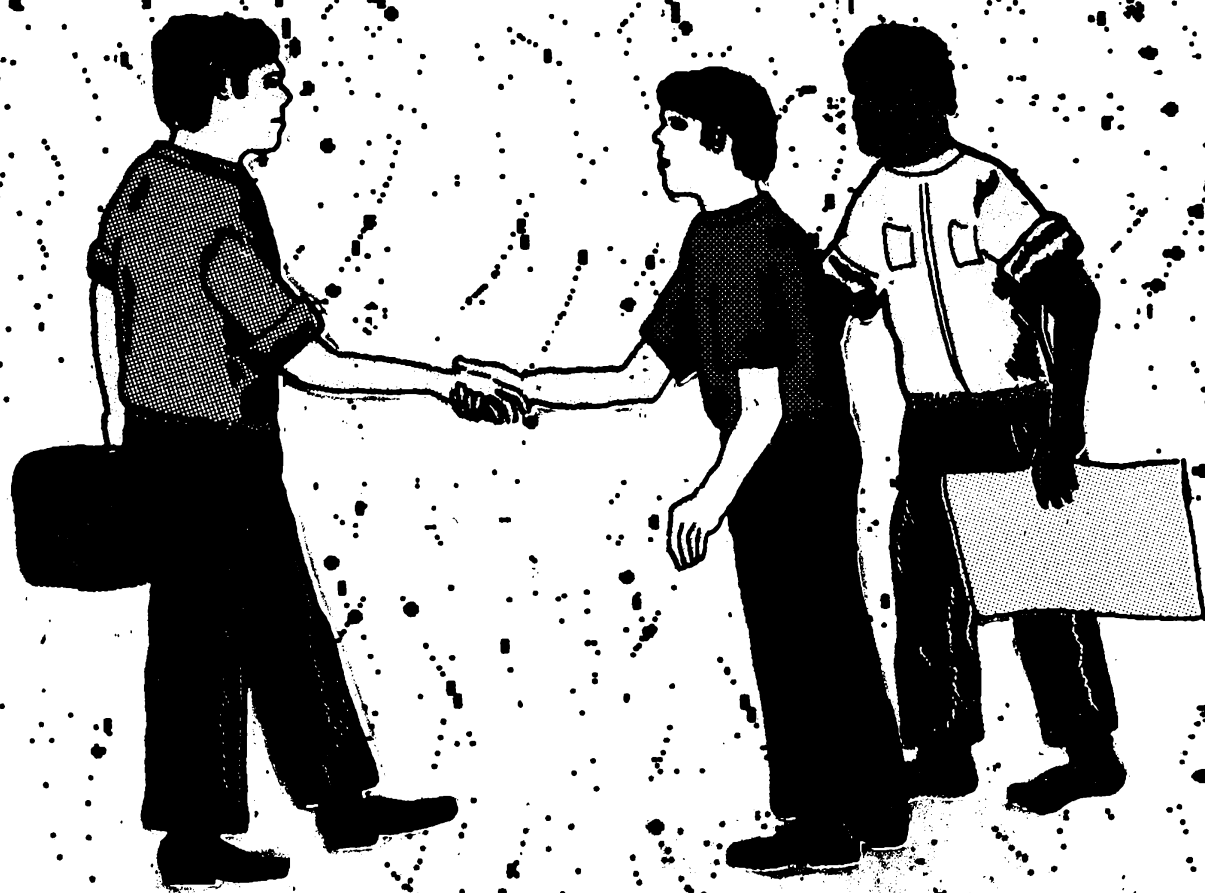


# *Whitefella Culture*



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Susanne Hargrave

Stories illustrated by Colin Brown

Summer Institute of Linguistics  
Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch  
Darwin



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## WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This is a book about culture, about whitefella culture and about Aboriginal culture. Culture is more than songs, paintings and ceremonies. It is more than houses, clothes and tools. Culture is the way we think, the way we act, the way we feel about things.

We learn a lot of our culture when we are children. Our parents teach us by the way they act and by the things they say. So when we grow up, we know how to fit into our own culture.

This book is not saying white culture is better or Aboriginal culture is better. They are just different. We are all human beings who are alike in many ways, but our cultures teach us to act differently and think differently.

The stories in this book are about an Aboriginal community. They are stories about an Aboriginal family and some white people who live in that community. These are made-up stories, but they are like real things that happen to real people.

## **To Aboriginal people who read this book:**

Some Aboriginal people have said to white people: 'We don't understand white people's ways. We need help to understand your culture, just like you need help to understand us.'

That's why I have made this book, to help Aboriginal people understand white culture. And this book is in plain English so that Aboriginal people who still use their own languages every day can understand it better.

This book is not saying you should become like a white person. Maybe you just want to read this book to find out about white people. Maybe you want to know about good manners in white culture, to help you when you go to white meetings. Or you might want to become a 'two-way' kind of person, a person who can get along in white culture and in Aboriginal culture. But you are still an Aboriginal person, with Aboriginal culture. And you can decide how you want to use the things you learn in this book.

## **To white people who read this book:**

The first edition of this book was a draft edition. I asked for feedback, and many people gave helpful comments. That draft edition was written for Aboriginal people, especially Aboriginal people who live in their own communities. But a lot of white people were reading the book, too. The stories helped them understand Aboriginal culture better. So I have changed the stories a bit, to make them even more helpful to white readers. And I have added a section on good manners in Aboriginal culture.

## **People who helped with this book:**

I want to thank the following people from SIL who helped me make this book better: Margaret Borneman, David Crawford, Paul Eckert, David Glasgow, Jim and Marjorie Marsh, Chester and Lyn Street, and especially Eirlys Richards. Other people have also helped: Margaret Bain, Steven Harris, Joyce Hudson, Mangiwa Sagiba and all the people who gave me feedback on the draft edition.

I want to give special thanks to Olive Biendurru from Christmas Creek, WA who read the stories and discussed them with me. Her advice was most helpful.

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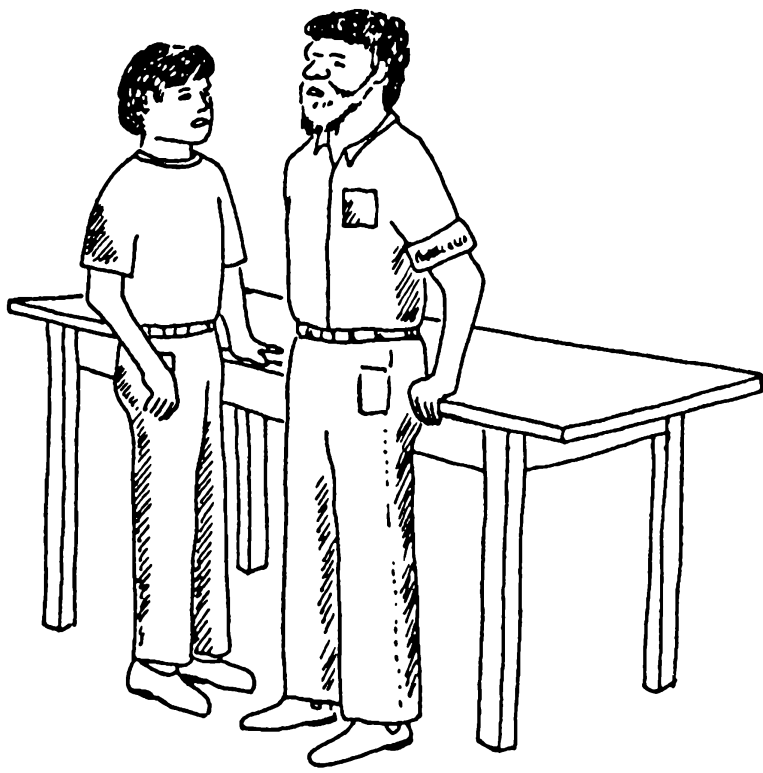
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## LEARNING ABOUT CULTURE

Brian was the chairman of the community council. He was talking to Richard, the whitefella who worked at the local art centre. Richard had lived in the community for five years. Now he and his family were leaving and going down south to live.

Brian and Richard were talking about Richard's first visit to the community. Richard said, 'Do you remember when I first came here? I was asking too many questions and going places where I wasn't supposed to go. I was an ignorant person then. I didn't understand about Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people.'

'Yeah, I remember that', said Brian. 'And you didn't understand why some people couldn't talk to each other. I had to explain that mother-in-law rule to you.'

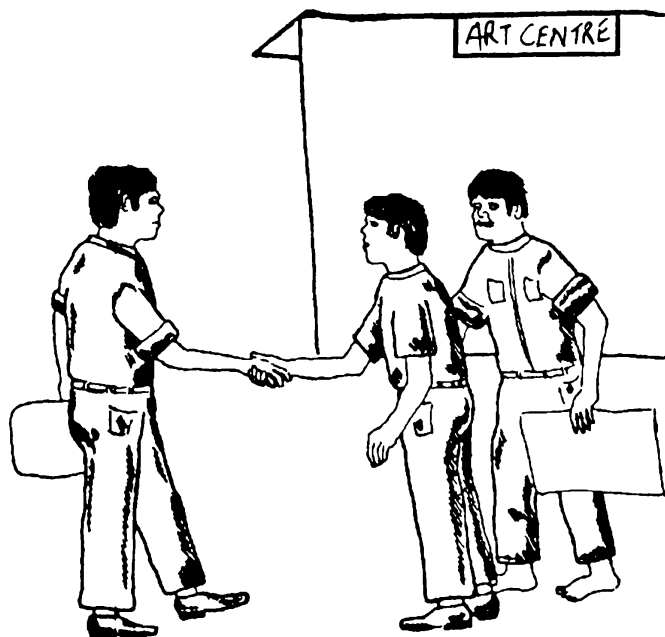
'I've really learnt a lot', said Richard. 'You've been a good teacher, Brian. One of my friends down south helped me, too. He sent me some good things to read, some books that help white people understand about Aboriginal culture.'

'I wish they had some books like that for Aboriginal people', Brian said. 'We need something to help us understand whitefella culture better. I still don't understand a lot of things that white people do.'

'Yeah, we do some strange things', agreed Richard. 'I guess I've never seen a book that tells Aboriginal people about whitefella culture. We should write a book like that some day! We could write about things that have happened here.'

Richard and Brian kept talking about things they had learned from each other. They talked about things that had happened in the community. They had many stories to tell, and some of those stories are in this book. They are stories that explain a bit about whitefella culture and a bit about Aboriginal culture.

## STORY 1: BEING FRIENDLY



Brian's uncle Joe was a good artist, and the community art centre sold a lot of his paintings. Joe liked the whitefella Richard that helped at the centre. Richard had been in the community five years and knew most of the people. Now he and his family were leaving.

A new whitefella was coming to take Richard's job. Today he was coming just for a short visit, to meet some of the artists. Richard brought him to the art centre and introduced him to Joe and the other artists. The new man looked around and asked some questions about the centre. He tried to talk to Joe and the other artists, but they didn't talk much.

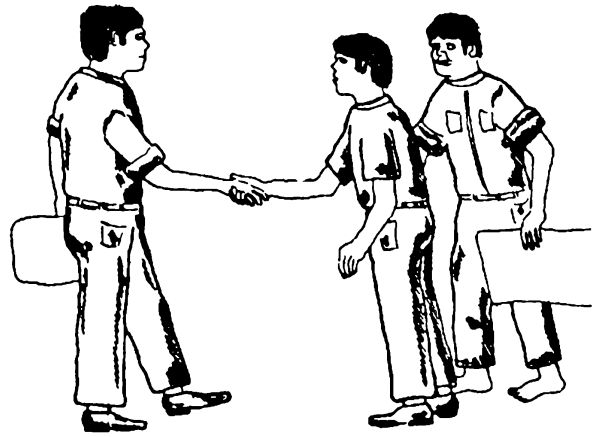
After the new man left on the plane, Richard was talking to Joe. 'You know, that new man was a bit worried. He thought you and the other men didn't like him. He thought you didn't want him to come here.'

Joe was surprised about that. He asked Richard, 'Is he still going to come here?'

'Yeah, he will come', Richard said. 'I told him that Aboriginal people act different from whites. They don't talk to new people the same way white people do. I told him everything is okay. I think he understands now.'

## Thinking about 'Being Friendly'

The new whitefella thought Joe and the other artists would smile at him and ask him questions. He thought they might ask him about his trip and how soon he and his family would be coming. That is how white people show friendliness when they meet someone new. They usually smile and maybe shake hands. They ask questions about the person's trip. In white culture, it is important to be friendly in this way even if you don't feel like it. It's the way to be nice to other people. It helps the other person feel comfortable.

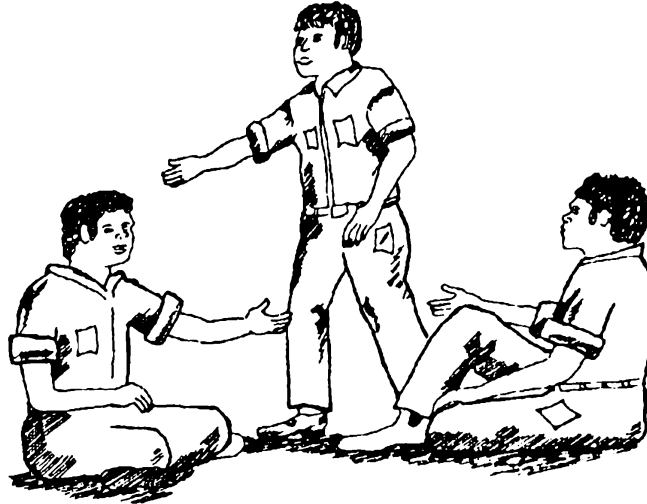


It's a bit different in Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal people don't like to hurry into meeting new people. They like to wait awhile and see what the new person is like. Then they know more how to act toward that person. And Aboriginal people think it is rude to ask lots of questions, especially to strangers.

When a white person and an Aboriginal person meet each other for the first time, they should remember that they have different ways of being friendly. And they have different ways of being shy. The white person should be a bit more quiet and not ask so many questions. He can just say a few friendly things to the Aboriginal person. And he shouldn't feel bad if the Aboriginal person doesn't talk much to him.

When an Aboriginal person wants to welcome a white person, he can smile at the white person and maybe talk to him. He can ask the whitefella a few questions, like where he is from and if he had a good trip, or some questions like that. The white person is probably feeling uncomfortable because he is new to the community. He will be very happy if someone talks to him and smiles at him.

## STORY 2: ASKING FOR HELP



Brian's uncle Joe was sitting down at the art centre. He had been working on a big bark painting. Now he was just sitting and talking to another man. A whitefella came in. He was the new man at the art centre. The whitefella started looking all around the room. He looked worried.

The whitefella asked the men, 'Have you seen that kangaroo painting? That one that Jack painted? I'm supposed to send it to town on the plane today, but I can't find it.'

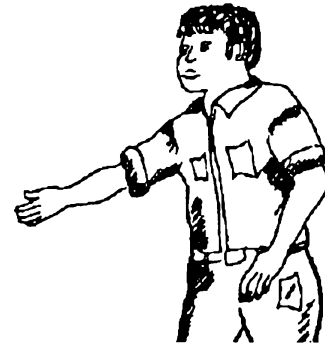
Joe and his friend didn't say anything. They just sat and watched the whitefella running around the room, looking for that painting.

Finally the whitefella said to them, 'Can you help me look for that painting? The plane will get here soon.'

Joe was angry. He told the whitefella, 'I don't know anything about that painting.' Then he got up and left the art centre.

## Thinking about 'Asking for Help'

Joe was angry. He thought the whitefella was accusing him of taking the painting. Joe was thinking like this: 'That whitefella thinks I've got that painting. But I don't know anything about it. That's Jack's painting.'



But the whitefella wasn't accusing Joe. He just wanted Joe and the other man to help him. The whitefella was angry at himself. He was angry because he couldn't find that painting. He was worried he wouldn't find it before the plane came.

When the two men didn't help him, the whitefella thought they were lazy and rude. Then the whitefella got angry at them because they didn't help him.

In white culture, people expect other people to help them when something goes wrong or they need some help. When a person loses something or he needs help, it is the right thing for other people who are there to help him. They help before they are asked to do it.

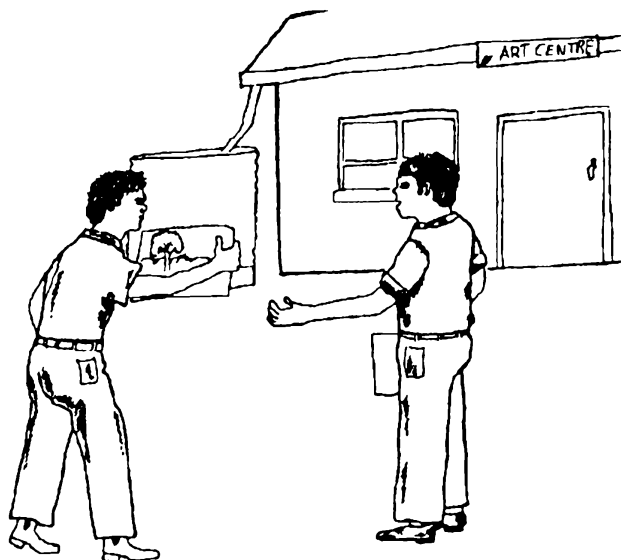
In Aboriginal culture, it's important not to push yourself into other people's business. You must wait until you are invited to do something. And it's important to make it very clear when you are just asking for help and when you are accusing someone.

This story tells us that white people and Aboriginal people can get angry at each other just because they don't understand each other. They are thinking and talking in different ways.

It would be good if the white man would say something like this: 'I can't find that painting. I guess I've lost it somewhere. Can you help me find it before the plane comes?'

But the white man might not know he should talk like that. So maybe the Aboriginal person could say, 'Do you want some help looking for that painting?'. The white man would be very happy to have someone help him.

## STORY 3: ANSWERING QUESTIONS



Brian's uncle Joe was working on some paintings at home. The new fellow from the art centre came around to his house and spoke to Joe: 'Joe, the man in town wants to buy some of your paintings. I think you told me you could do 3 paintings. Is that right?'

'Yeah, 3 paintings', Joe answered.

'Well, I'm going into town next week. I can take your 3 paintings to sell to that man. Will you have them finished by next week?'

'Yeah, I'll finish them', said Joe.

'That's good', said the whitefella from the art centre. 'I'll ring that man in town to tell him. He knows some people who want to buy those paintings straight away.'

The next week Joe took his paintings to the art centre. He had 2 paintings finished.

The man asked him, 'Where is the third painting, Joe? Can you bring it, too?'

'I don't know about that painting', Joe said. 'Maybe it got lost.'

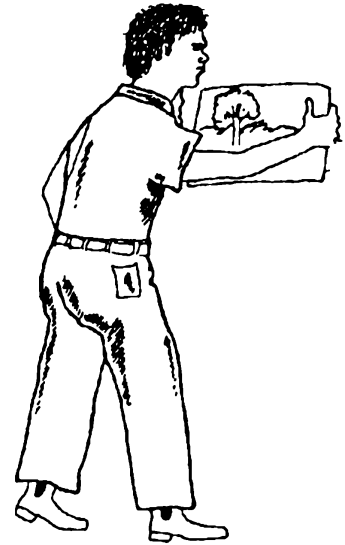
'Well', said the whitefella, 'I'm sorry about that. I promised that man in town that I'd have 3 of your paintings for him. He's not

going to be very happy.'

Joe didn't say anything. He went back home. A few days later he started working on the third painting.

### Thinking about 'Answering Questions'

White people ask direct questions because they like to find out things quickly. They like people to give them straight answers, so they can get on with their work.



In Aboriginal culture, people don't ask so many questions, especially direct questions. They find out what they need to know by watching or by asking in roundabout ways. And many times it is rude to say a straight out 'no'.

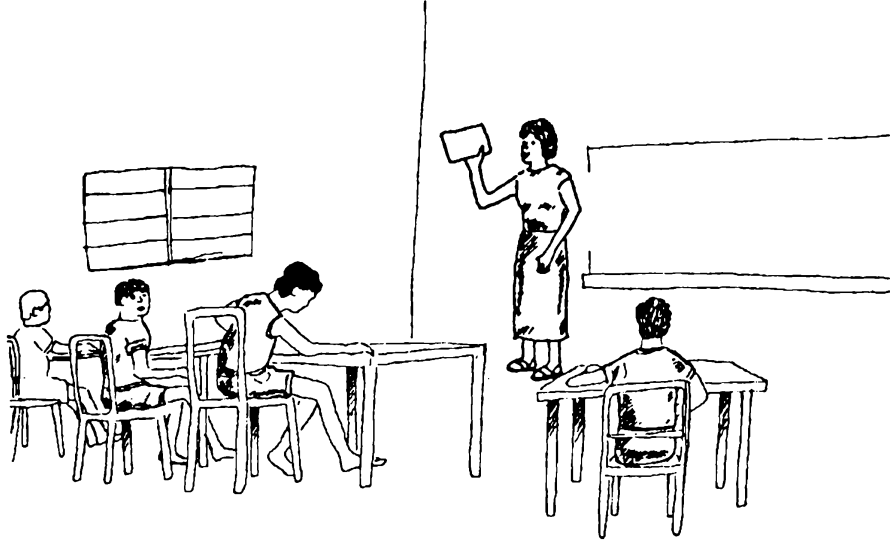
It would be better for the whitefella to say something like this to Joe: 'Joe, that man in town likes to buy your paintings. I could take some of your paintings into town next week. You might want to sell some of them, maybe one, or maybe two or three.' Then Joe can say how many paintings he wants to sell. He doesn't have to say a straight 'no'.

But if the whitefella asks a direct question, it's best to give him a straight answer, even if it is bad news. The man from the art centre asked Joe, 'Can you finish those 3 paintings by next week?'. Joe knew he wasn't going to finish all 3 paintings, so this is how Joe could answer the whitefella's question: 'I'm sorry, but I can't get those 3 paintings done, maybe just 2. I can give you 2 really nice paintings next week.'

Sometimes Aboriginal people think like this: 'That man should know what I'm really saying. I'm telling him by the way I answer him.' But white people don't know all that. They don't know what the Aboriginal person is thinking. It's better to tell the white person straight out, so he will understand and get it straight.



## STORY 4: DOING YOUR BEST



'Jimmy', his Mum yelled at him. 'The other kids are going to school now. They want you to come along.'

'I'm not going to school today', Jimmy answered.

Jimmy was Brian's son. He had always liked school. But today he didn't want to go to school.

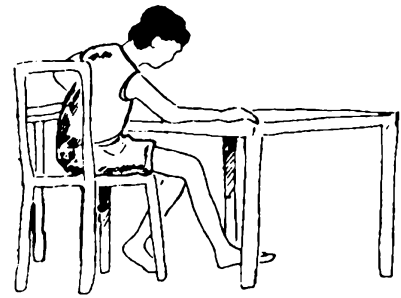
Brian knew something must be wrong, so he talked to his son. Jimmy finally told him about the new teacher. She was a nice person, but she had made Jimmy feel ashamed. He had finished some maths problems and got them all right. So the teacher praised him in front of the whole class. She told everyone, 'Jimmy got all his answers right. He is doing very good work.'

Now all of Jimmy's friends were teasing him. He didn't want to see his friends today. And he didn't want to see the teacher.

After a few days, Jimmy went back to school. But he didn't do his work right and he talked a lot in class. The teacher had to tell him to stop talking. She wondered what was wrong with Jimmy. He used to be such a good student.

## Thinking about 'Doing Your Best'

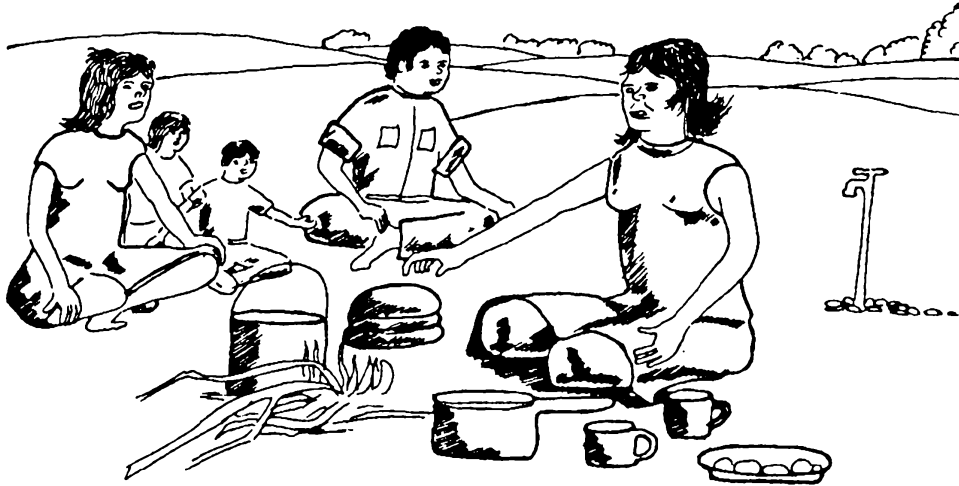
Jimmy's teacher was happy when he did good work. She wanted him to keep on doing good work, so she praised him. She praised him in front of the whole class. The teacher thought that would make Jimmy feel good. She didn't know she was making him feel ashamed in front of the other kids. She didn't understand about Aboriginal culture.



An Aboriginal teacher would help Jimmy in a different way. She wouldn't praise Jimmy in front of the whole class. She might talk to him quietly about his good work. Or she might praise the whole class. That would help everyone to work together and learn together.

Maybe an Aboriginal teacher at the school could talk to the new teacher. Or maybe Jimmy's Mum or Dad could talk to the new teacher. They could tell her that Jimmy was ashamed when she praised him in front of his friends. They could tell her it is best to talk to Jimmy quietly, by himself. And they could tell her it is good to praise the whole class, because that helps everyone.

## STORY 5: SAVING MONEY



It was Thursday, the day the pension cheques came. Jimmy's mother Ann bought a lot of food and a lot of meat at the store. That afternoon some of Ann's relations came from another community to visit. They ate a lot of the meat and they borrowed some money from Ann.

By Monday, all of the money was gone. And Ann only had a bit of food left. Ann went to see the white nursing sister. She knew the sister because Ann sometimes did cleaning at the health centre. Ann waited until no one else was around. Then she asked the sister for some money. She told her, 'I need some money to buy food'.

The nursing sister asked Ann, 'What happened to all the money you got last Thursday? You should still have some of that money left.'

'I had to give some to my relations', Ann said. 'A whole mob came to stay with us.'

'Well', said the nursing sister, 'I don't have much to give you. Just this \$10. You can pay me back after you get your next cheque.'

After Ann left, the nursing sister said to her white friend, 'I loan money to Ann because she always pays me back, but I wish her relations would stop asking her for money all the time!'.

## Thinking about 'Saving Money'

White people and Aboriginal people have different ideas about money. Aboriginal people are taught when they are children that they must give things to their relations. That is a very strong teaching for Aboriginal people. Then when an Aboriginal person needs money, she can go to her relations and ask them for some. Giving and asking for money is part of being relations in Aboriginal culture.



It is very different in whitefella culture. Many white people are taught when they are children to be careful with their money. So when white people get their pay each week, they think about what to do with that money. They think about the things they will need to buy until they get paid again. They try to save some of the money and not spend it all at once. They can usually save their money because they don't have lots of relations that they have to share it with.

White people try to save money to take care of themselves and their own children. Most white people don't like to borrow money from their relations or from their friends. If they borrow money, they borrow it from a bank. In white culture, money is a part of working; it's a part of one's job. It's not so much a part of being relations or being friends.

So money can make trouble between white people and Aboriginal people. Some Aboriginal people might get a bit angry if a white friend doesn't give them money. And some white people might get a bit angry when an Aboriginal friend asks them for money, especially if the friend asks many times or asks for a lot of money.

Aboriginal people and white people have to remember that their cultures are different. But the person who is always asking other people for money is probably a rude person both in white culture and Aboriginal culture.

## STORY 6: BEING FRIENDS



It was Saturday afternoon and the shop was closed. Jimmy's mother Ann needed some food. She went to see her friend Janet who was the storekeeper's wife.

Ann went to Janet's house. After sitting for awhile she asked her, 'Janet, can you open up the shop for me? My little girl's been sick and I need to buy some food now.'

Janet answered, 'I'm sorry, Ann, but I can't do that. You know we tell everybody they can't buy food on Saturday afternoon. They have to buy their food on Saturday morning. If I open up the store for you, lots of other people will want to buy things too.'

Janet gave Ann some of her own bread, but Ann was not happy. Janet was a 'sister' to Ann, and they visited each other a lot. Ann thought Janet was not being a good sister to her.

## Thinking about 'Being Friends'

Ann and Janet had different ideas about friendship. This is how Ann thought: 'Janet is my friend; she is a sister to me. So she will open up the store and let me buy some food. She will want to help me and my family.'



But this is how Janet thought: 'My husband and I are the storekeepers for everybody in this community. We have to treat everyone the same way when they come to buy food. Ann is asking me to open up the store just for her, but I can't do that. She's expecting too much from me.'

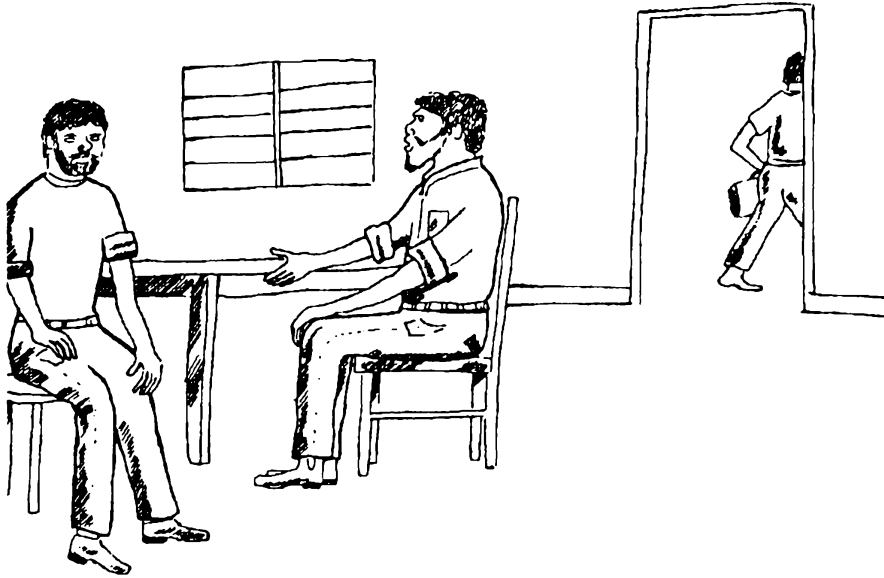
In Aboriginal culture, family relations are most important. Aboriginal people help their relations all the time. They don't worry about whether it is 'fair' or whether it is the right time to help. And Aboriginal people don't make so much difference between work time and family time. Family and relations are the most important things all the time.

In white culture, people are more careful about asking friends to give them things or do special things for them. They think about how well they know that person and they think about whether they are asking something fair and 'reasonable'. In white culture, the person asking for something has to think about it first. He thinks about how the other person will feel. He doesn't want to lose a friend by asking too much.

There's another thing about white culture. In white culture, there is a difference between 'working' and 'relations'. When they are doing work things and business things, white people are not supposed to treat their family or their friends any better than other people. It's a bit like being two different people: a 'work' person when you are doing your job, and a 'relations' person when you are at home. That's why Janet didn't give Ann food from the shop. She thought it was the wrong thing to do.

So if an Aboriginal person and a white person want to be friends, they have to think about how the other person feels. They both have to change a bit if they want to have a good friendship.

## STORY 7: BEING ON TIME



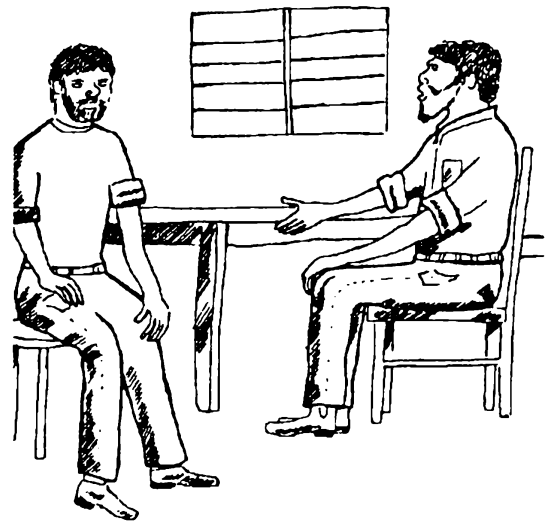
Brian is the chairman of the community council. He often goes to meetings with government people and other whitefellas. But this time, Brian's younger brother is going to a meeting. It is an important meeting with some government people from Canberra.

Brian talked to his brother: 'This is an important meeting. The whitefellas need to listen to you and the others. So be sure you get to that meeting on time. You have to think and act a bit like a whitefella at this kind of meeting. So don't be late!'

Brian's brother went to the meeting. When the meeting was over and he came home, he told Brian about it all: 'The meeting was okay. I got there early, like you said, but those government men were late. We were waiting and waiting on those whitefellas from Canberra. But finally they rang and said the plane was going to be late. The plane had engine trouble. There was a lot of growling about that! We were tired of sitting and waiting. But the Canberra men finally came, and we had the meeting.'

## Thinking about 'Being on Time'

Aboriginal culture is like most other cultures in the world. Most cultures don't have rules about starting things on time. For most people in the world, the important thing is that something happens. It doesn't matter about the time it starts.



But in white culture many things are supposed to start at a certain time, things like meetings and classes. If one thing starts really late, then that makes other things get started late. A person who is very late to meetings or who is nearly always late makes some white people upset.

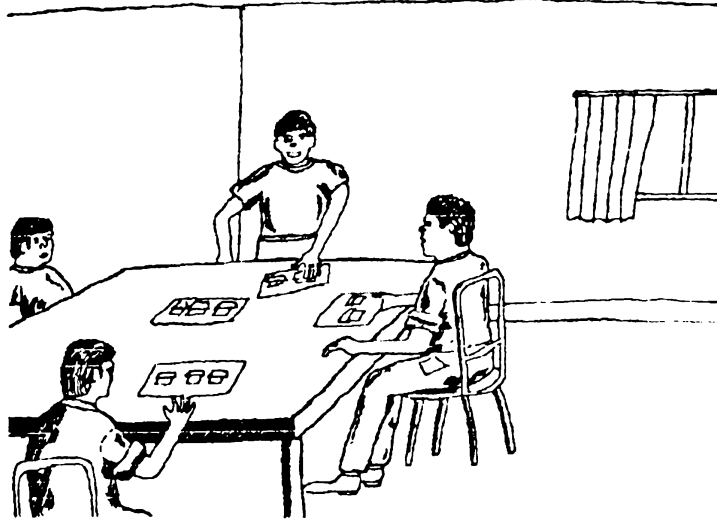
In this story, the men from Canberra were late, but it wasn't their fault. They were late because of the aeroplane. But they did the right thing in white culture: they rang and explained why they were late. They didn't want to make the people at the meeting wait and wait, wondering what had happened.

There's another important thing to do in white culture. If you tell someone else, 'I'll meet you tomorrow after lunch', then you should try to be there just like you said. If something happens and you can't meet the person, then it is good manners to ring that person or send him a message. You should tell that person why you can't meet him tomorrow, and talk about another time to meet. That's the right way to do things in whitefella culture.

Brian is a smart man. He knows the right way to do things in Aboriginal culture and the right way to do things in white culture. So when he goes to whitefella meetings, he remembers to be there like he promised and to be there on time. Now he is teaching his younger brother about these things in white culture.



## STORY 8: MAKING PROMISES



Brian and the other people on the community council were having a big meeting. A government man was talking to them about some new houses for the community. He showed the council members some pictures of different kinds of houses. He asked the members what kind of houses the community wanted. They all looked carefully at the pictures and talked about it. Then they showed the whitefella the kind of houses they wanted.

The whitefella also asked them how many new houses they needed. They talked about it and decided that they needed 10 new houses. The government man wrote that down, and he wrote down the kind of houses they wanted. Then they all walked around the community. The council members showed the whitefella where the new houses should be built.

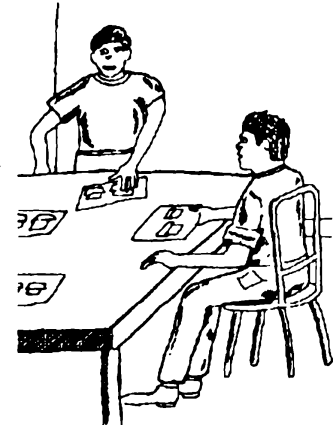
After they looked around, the whitefella told them, 'I can't promise you that you'll get new houses. A lot of people are asking for houses, and there isn't enough government money to buy all of them. We'll just have to wait and see.'

After the government man left, some of the council members were telling their relations things like this: 'Yeah, you will get a new house. That man from the government wrote it all down. He put down 10 houses and the kind of houses we want. We showed him just where we want those houses.'

Several months went by and nothing happened. Some of the older men started grumbling about 'whitefella lies'. Brian talked to them: 'That whitefella said maybe you will get 10 houses, maybe you won't get 10 houses. Maybe there isn't enough money. Maybe we will only get 5 houses, and maybe we will have to wait a long time. Some other Aboriginal people might get their houses first.' But the men were still grumbling.

### Thinking about 'Making Promises'

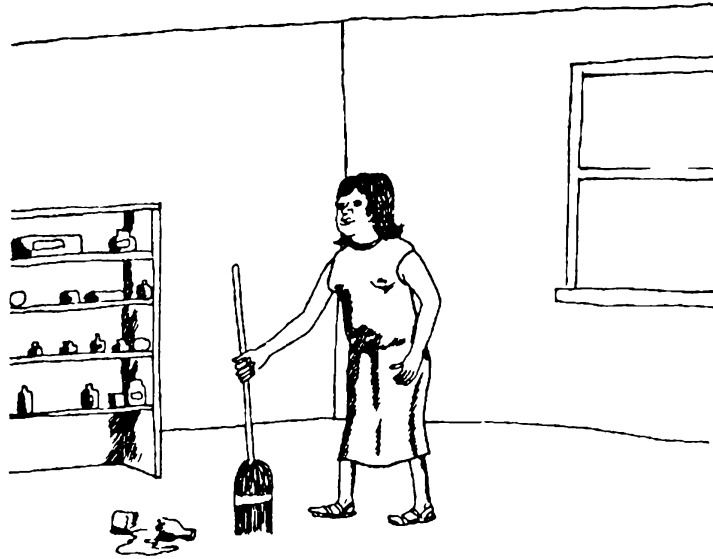
Some of the men on the council thought the government man had lied to them. They talked to each other like this: 'That whitefella talked to us about those 10 houses. He showed us pictures of those houses, and he saw where we want the houses built. He wrote it all down. He promised that the government would give us 10 houses. But he was telling us lies.'



But the government man wasn't lying and he wasn't promising them 10 houses. He was just saying 'maybe'. Maybe there will be enough money to build 10 houses; maybe there won't be enough money. He was trying to find out how many houses they wanted and what kind of houses they wanted. Then he could work out how much money it would all cost. Then he could ask the government people if there was enough money to build those houses.

Brian knew all about this. He knew white people and Aboriginal people talk about things in a different way. White people often talk about things that 'might' happen. These things are just ideas. They are not for sure. They are the whitefella's way of thinking about the future and getting ready for the future. But some of the men on the council didn't understand that. That's why they grumbled.

## STORY 9: MAKING MISTAKES



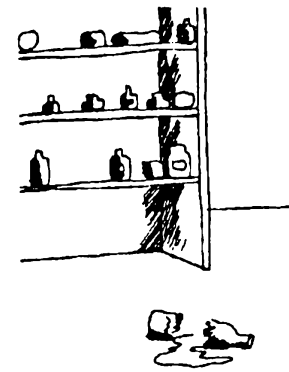
Ann was cleaning at the clinic. She was sweeping the floor near some shelves. Suddenly a bottle crashed to the floor! The broom handle had knocked a big bottle of medicine off the shelf. Nobody else was there. Ann quickly swept up the glass and cleaned up the medicine. The nursing sister came in later, but Ann didn't say anything to her about the medicine bottle. She just finished her cleaning and went home.

Ann didn't do any more cleaning at the clinic that week. She got her niece to do the cleaning. The niece came home from cleaning one day and started talking about the nursing sister: 'That nursing sister was angry today! She can't find a big bottle of medicine for the children. She was asking everybody about that medicine!'

Ann didn't go back to the clinic for a long time.

## Thinking about 'Making Mistakes'

Ann was afraid when she saw the broken medicine bottle. She was afraid the nursing sister would speak hard to her and 'shame' her. Ann didn't want anyone to know about that broken medicine bottle.



White people get afraid like that, too. They don't like other people to know when they have made a mistake or broken something. But they think about what will happen later if they don't tell someone. Probably someone will find out what happened. The 'boss' will probably find out, and then she will be really angry. She will be angry because the person didn't tell her what happened. So it will all be much worse.

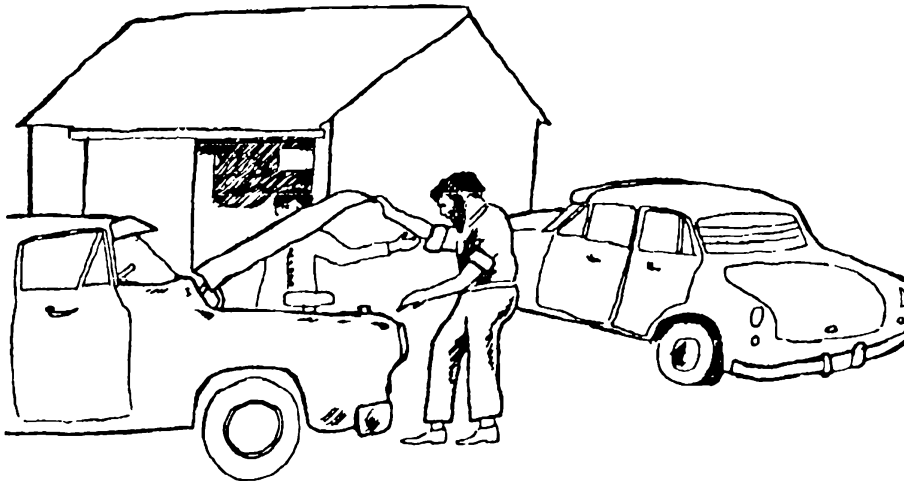
It would be a good thing for Ann to tell the nursing sister what happened. She should tell her straight away so the sister can get some more of the medicine for the children.

Ann could say something like this to the nursing sister: 'I'm sorry, sister. I was sweeping the floor and the broom handle knocked that big bottle of medicine on the floor. I'm sorry about that broken bottle.'

Ann might be too afraid to talk to the nursing sister, but maybe she can tell someone else what happened. She could ask one of the health workers to explain everything to the nursing sister. The health worker could tell the nursing sister that Ann was sorry about what happened.

The nursing sister might be upset, but she will be glad that Ann let her know about the spilt medicine.

## STORY 10: LOOKING AFTER THINGS



Brian's brother was talking to the white mechanic about his car. It wouldn't go any more, and the mechanic said he couldn't fix it this time.

So Brian's brother told the mechanic, 'I guess I'd better get a new one. What kind of cars are the best?'

'Well', the mechanic said, 'I'm going into town next week to buy myself another car. I have a good mate there who sells cars. You can come with me and I'll help you find a good one.'

So the next week Brian's brother and the mechanic went into town. Both of them bought cars. They were the same kind of car and both of them were in good condition. The car dealer told them, 'Take care of these cars and they will last you for 5 or 10 years'.

After several months, Brian's brother took his car to the mechanic. It had some big dents in it and was leaking oil. The mechanic took a look at it: 'What happened to your car? It's in bad shape! Look at my car over there. It still looks good and it runs perfectly.'

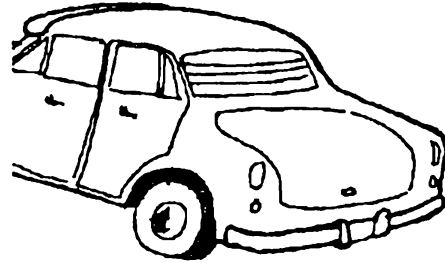
'Yeah', said Brian's brother, 'You're lucky. Your mate sold you a better car than mine.'

'No, it isn't luck', said the mechanic. 'Your car was just as good

as mine, but I know how to look after my car. And I don't have lots of family who always borrow it!

### Thinking about 'Looking After Things'

White parents teach their children to look after things. They talk to their children like this: 'Don't throw that bike down on the ground! It cost a lot of money!' So white people learn to take good care of things they own, especially things that cost a lot of money, like cars and videos and televisions. They think about how much these things cost and how much they have to work to get that money.



And white people don't let lots of other people use their expensive things. They are afraid the people might break them. So white people usually borrow things only from a few of their relations or only from really good friends. If a white person borrows something, he is supposed to look after that thing. If he breaks it or damages it, then he should pay to have that thing fixed. That is how white people are taught in their culture.

Brian's parents taught him and his brother a different way. Aboriginal parents teach their children to share their things with their relations. They teach them to let their sister or their cousin have their toy. They teach them that it is important to give things to your relations. That's the way you keep the relation strong; you keep it strong by giving and by borrowing. In Aboriginal culture, it is not so important to look after things like cars or videos.

So Brian's brother let his relations use his car a lot. He shared his car even though he knew the car might get broken.

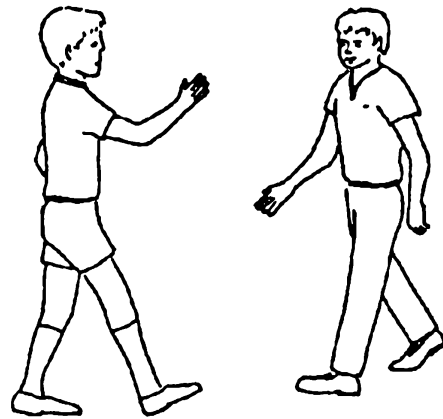


## GOOD MANNERS IN WHITE CULTURE

All of us feel most comfortable when we are in our own culture, with people we know. We feel a bit scared when we are with people from another culture, because we don't always know what to do. You might feel like this when you go to whitefella things or have to meet a lot of white people. So here are some more things about white culture. These are things that might help you feel more comfortable when you are with white people.

### Meeting people and greeting them

It is important in white culture to be friendly when you meet people. White people show friendliness by greeting each other. Watch white people and see how they greet others. Here are some of the ways you can greet white people:



When you are introduced to someone you don't know, be ready to shake hands if the person puts his/her hand out. Smile a bit and say something like, 'Glad to meet you'; or you can just say 'Hello'. If you are sitting down and the other person is standing up, it is polite to stand up when you greet the person.

If you already know the person who is being introduced, you probably won't shake hands, unless you haven't seen him or her for a long time.

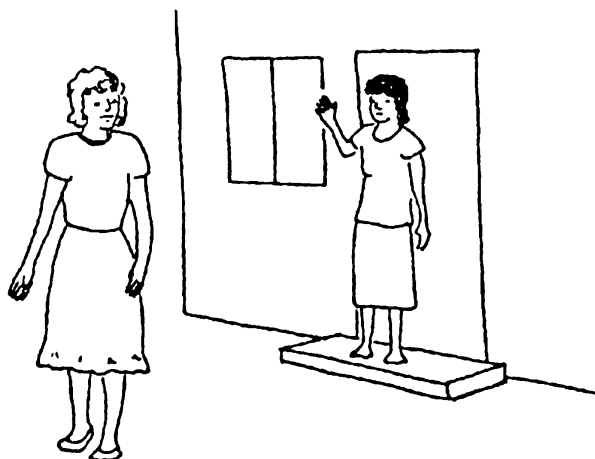
White people greet each other even if they have already talked to each other that day. So when you walk past a white person you know, it is good to look at that person and greet him or her in some way. You can just smile, or nod your head, or say 'Hello'.



When talking to white people, it is polite to look right at them. If you look at the floor or somewhere else all the time, this makes white people feel uncomfortable. They might think you don't want to talk to them.

### **Leaving a group of people**

In white culture, the person who is visiting someone else has to decide when it is time to leave. If you are visiting in someone else's home and there are other visitors, it is probably best to leave when the other visitors leave. If



you are visiting by yourself, you should watch to see if the man or woman at the house is getting a bit tired, or looks at their watch, or if they talk about something they have to do. That will tell you that it is probably about time for you to leave. Don't wait for the white person to tell you when to leave.

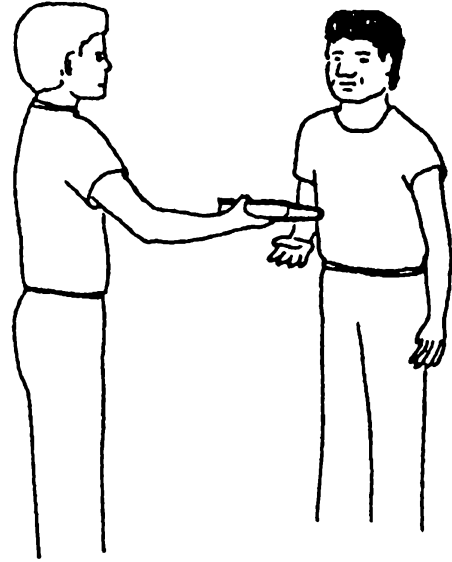
When you have been visiting someone you have just met and it is time for you to leave, you might say, 'Well, I'd better go now. I'm glad to have met you.' If you expect to see the person again, you can say something like this: 'Well, I hope to see you again soon.'

If you have been at a party or at some kind of meeting in someone's home, it is polite to say 'thank you' to the man or woman at that house just before you leave. You might tell them that you really enjoyed being there.

### **Saying 'please', 'I beg your pardon', 'thank you'**

White people often say these words. It is their way to be polite. If you ask a white person to do something for you or to give you something, it is good manners to say 'please'. For example, if you need a spoon to stir your tea, you can ask the person

serving the drinks, like this: 'Could you give me a spoon please?'. And when that person gives you the spoon, you should say 'Thank you'. It is good manners to say 'thanks' when a person gives you something or does something for you.



When a white person says something and you don't hear it, you can say 'I beg your pardon?'. When you say it like that, it is a question, and the white person will say the thing again. If you don't understand what that person is saying, you can say, 'I'm sorry, I don't understand. Could you say that again please?' Or if it is hard to understand the English, you can ask the person to speak more slowly.

If you accidentally bump someone or do something else just a bit wrong, you can say, 'I beg your pardon' or 'Excuse me; I'm sorry'.

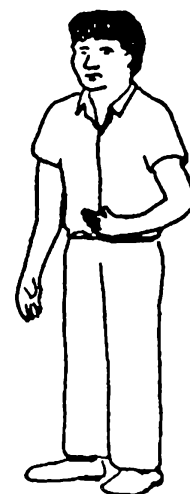
### **Answering questions**

It is good manners in white culture to answer questions. White people feel like they always have to give an answer, even if they don't want to. Sometimes white people ask, 'How are you?'. That is a kind of greeting and not a real question, but the other white person will still try to give an answer. The answer might be something like, 'I'm fine', or 'I'm okay'.

It can make a white person angry if he or she asks someone else a question and that person just stays quiet. If the person asking the question is a teacher or a policeman or a boss, then he/she might get very angry. So if a white person asks you a question and you don't want to be rude, you should give some kind of answer. Maybe you can just say, 'I don't know' or you might only give a short answer. But it is good to give some kind of answer.

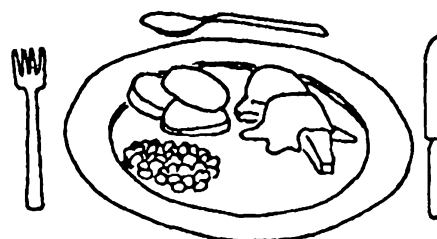
## Being clean and dressing neatly

White people usually try to be neat and clean unless they are working hard at something. It is especially important to be clean and neat when going to a party or to a meeting. If you are going to a meeting with white people and you don't know what kind of clothes to wear, you can ask somebody else who is going to that meeting. White people often have to ask that question. They don't know if they have to wear very nice clothes or just a little bit nice. So they ask someone else who is going to the meeting. But it is always polite in white culture to be clean and to wear clean clothes when you go to meet people.



## Eating

White people have different rules about eating. They have some rules for just eating at home but lots of other rules about eating at a restaurant or at a special dinner.



The best thing you can do is watch what other people do and copy that. Here are some important things to remember whenever you eat with a group of white people:

When the food is put out on tables and you take what you want, don't heap your plate up with food. You should watch how many other people are there and how much food there is. If you take a lot of food and someone else only gets a little, that is very rude. If it is just snack food, then it is polite to take only 2 or 3 things. After you eat those and have talked to other people, then you can go back to the table and take 2 or 3 things again.

If a white person offers you some food, don't take the lot. Just take a little bit. Most of the time it is best to take just one thing. If the white person wants you to take more than that, he will tell you. He might say, 'Oh, take another piece'. Then it is okay to take something else.

Don't talk if you have a lot of food in your mouth. Swallow the food first before you say something. A lot of white people don't follow this rule, but it is the polite way to eat.

When you are eating at a very nice meal don't put your elbows on the table. A lot of white people think this is an important rule even for eating at home.

If there is a dish of food on the table but it is not close to you, you should ask the person next to you to pass the food to you. You shouldn't reach a long way to get the food yourself.

## Meetings

When you are at a meeting and someone else is talking, it is good manners to look at that person. If you have to be writing things, you can still look up at the person sometimes. That is how white people show they are interested in what the person is saying. When you are listening to someone speak at a meeting, don't do a lot of talking to other people at the same time. And don't get up and walk out while the person is speaking. That is very rude in meetings. You only do that if there is a big reason for leaving, or if you are feeling sick.



White people act very differently when they have meetings. They talk a lot and sometimes very fast. Sometimes they get very excited. Sometimes two people are trying to talk at the same time. Most of the time this is normal and okay. This is what happens at white people's meetings. But if a white person is very loud and starts talking a lot when someone else is already talking, then he or she is being rude.

Sometimes you might think the white people are really angry at each other, but lots of times that is just how they talk at

meetings. They can talk loudly and argue but still be good friends. You will have to watch white people and learn to tell when they are really angry and when they are just having a strong talk with their friends.

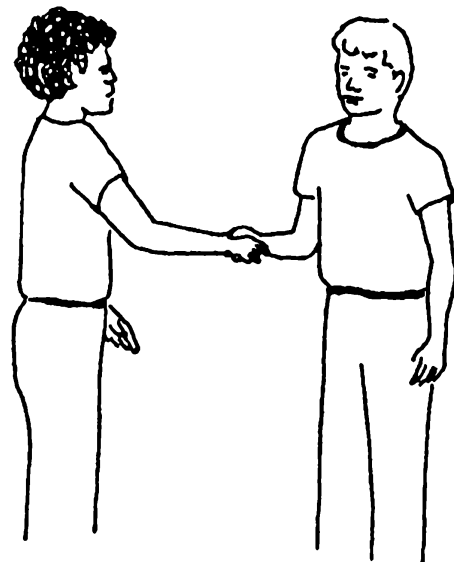
**REMEMBER:** In every culture, the person who cares about other people and who helps other people, that person is a polite person and a good person. You might forget some of the things written here, some of the ways of having good manners in white culture. But if you really care about other people and how they feel, and if you are always watching and learning, you will be a person with good manners in both Aboriginal culture and in white culture.

## GOOD MANNERS IN ABORIGINAL CULTURE

There are important differences between Aboriginal groups, but the following guidelines will apply to most Aboriginal communities. You will be far less likely to offend if you operate on the basis of these guidelines rather than white ways of behaving.

### Meeting people and greeting them

Aboriginal people do not traditionally greet each other every time they meet, as white people tend to do. So don't think that Aboriginal people are angry with you or don't like you if they don't say anything to you. Go ahead and say hello, nod your head, or give some greeting. Aboriginal people are used to whitefellas doing so and may expect it. But don't push yourself forward or ask lots of questions. And don't assume you will get a response. Sometimes the way white people show friendliness is rude and pushy in Aboriginal culture.



In some places, Aboriginal people expect to shake hands. In other places, they don't. Watch what others do or if the person you are meeting seems prepared to shake hands.

In most communities it is not polite to ask a person directly for their name; people often don't like to give this information. If you need to find out someone's name, quietly ask someone else, preferably someone you already know. Names are regarded by Aboriginal people as a private possession, perhaps more akin to

a body part. They are not used as freely as in white culture. Aboriginal people usually address each other by using kin terms or 'skin' terms (section/subsection terms).

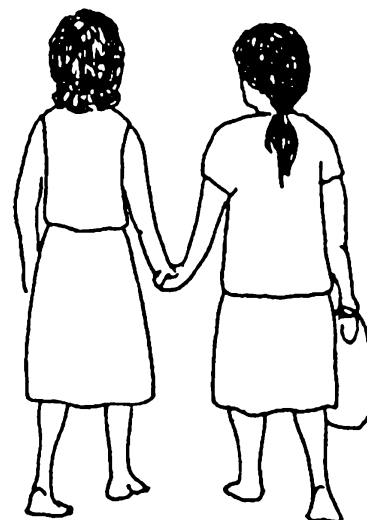
### Leaving a group of people

When you have been visiting a group of people, don't be offended if they tell you 'you can go now'. In white culture, the visitor is expected to make the first signs of leaving. But in Aboriginal culture, either the visitor or the host can decide when it would be good for the visitor to leave. If you have been visiting and want to leave, just say something like, 'Well, I'm going now'. But even better, learn the phrase for leaving in the Aboriginal person's own language!



### Relationships between men and women

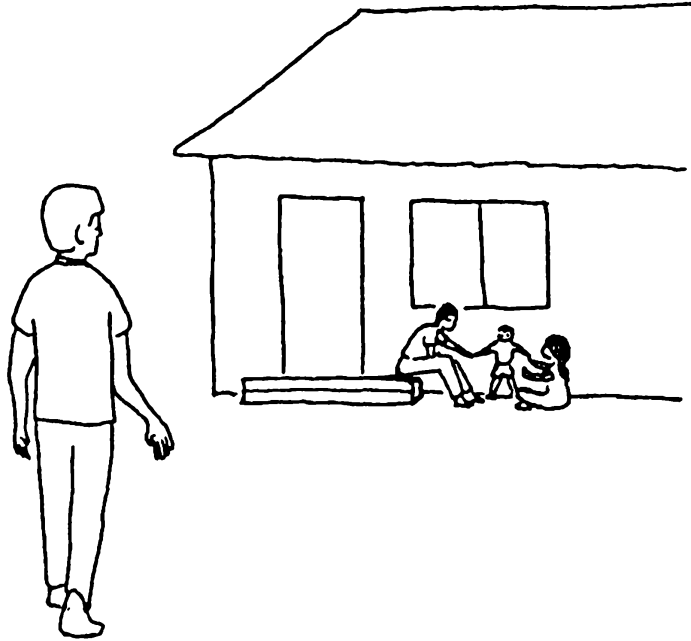
In Aboriginal society, there is more division between men and women. Men most often talk and interact with men, and women with women. It is best not to touch a person of the opposite sex in public, to join a group of the opposite sex unless invited, or to work in private with just one person of the opposite sex without first checking if it is okay.



Men and women do not usually show affection for each other in public. You are more likely to see physical touching and signs of affection between people of the same sex. If an Aboriginal person of the same sex as you is glad to know you and is comfortable with you, they may hold your hand or touch you in some way. That is a sign of friendship.

## Being careful about privacy

It's best not to visit a home until you know someone from there or have permission to visit. When you approach a group of people or areas where Aboriginal people live, approach slowly. Make sure the people can see you coming. Use paths and stop some distance away, calling out to see if it's okay to visit just then.



Entering the living area around an Aboriginal home is like walking into a whitefella house: you shouldn't do it without being invited.

You should learn what areas of the community and the surrounding country are off limits for you. Some areas might be 'men's country' or 'women's country' and therefore not open to the opposite sex. In many groups, there are living areas just for young/unmarried men and some also that are just for women. Other areas of the country may be sacred areas where only certain people are allowed to go. Don't go wandering around the community or out bush until you know the local situation and rules.

Do not, of course, take any photos without permission, even if you think it is just an ordinary bush scene. It is very rude not to ask permission of those who have local authority in the community and for the land.

## Dressing properly

Women should not expose the upper thigh area; it is best to wear rather full skirts that are long enough to keep the upper legs covered when sitting down on the ground.



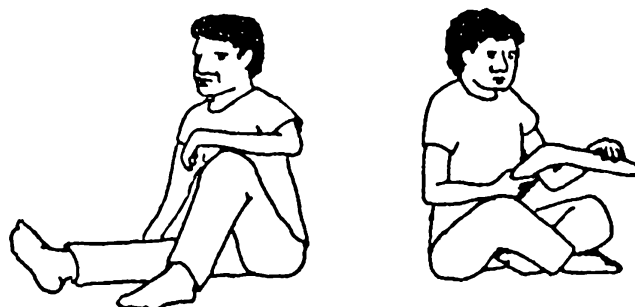


In strongly traditional communities, few adult women wear slacks or jeans, and you are less likely to offend if you observe their standards of modesty. Bathing/swimming is usually done in full dress. These standards are changing, especially among younger women, but it is good to learn and to respect the dress standards of the older, more traditional women.

Aboriginal men in some areas, such as Central Australia and the Kimberleys, usually wear long trousers. This seems to be a part of the cattle industry tradition and is not a rule of modesty that white men must follow.

### Important taboos

All Aboriginal groups have the taboo relationship between a man and his mother-in-law. Sometimes this taboo is extended to the



woman's brothers and her husband, and usually includes some degree of respect/avoidance of all women classified as mother-in-law in the kinship system. The taboo generally means the people are not allowed to speak or touch directly. It may mean total avoidance of the other's presence. Groups vary in how closely they observe this taboo and in how much they expect outsiders to conform.

Other social taboos are found only in certain areas or among certain groups, e.g. avoidance between adult brothers and sisters in Arnhem Land and other northern groups, avoidance between brothers in some desert groups, and, in some areas, avoidance between brothers-in-law.

The most important thing is to be aware of these taboos and who they affect. Then you won't be expecting the wrong people to be working together or travelling together. These taboos affect children also, so white teachers should learn about them from an Aboriginal adult.

Another widespread taboo is against the use of a dead person's

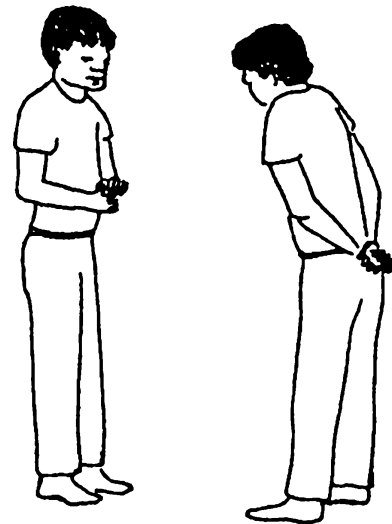
name for a certain time period following the death. The taboo extends to using that same name for any person and also to the use of words which sound the same or are similar. The more important the person, the longer the time period. It is very offensive to use that taboo word. Many groups have a special term which is used instead of a dead person's name. If several people have died in a community, you will hear the special term used a lot. You should learn to use it, too. You will know the taboo is lifted when you hear others, especially close kin of the dead person, using that name.

It is also generally taboo to show a picture of a person after his/her death, and any photos of the person should be kept out of sight, including photos in publications. Recordings of the person's voice are also taboo in many communities and should not be played in public.

So it is important to know who has died and what words are taboo. But you should not ask for this information directly. You must learn to be very observant and find out things in a roundabout way, as Aboriginal people do.

### **Other important guidelines to follow**

Avoid staring at people or their living areas. Aboriginal people observe a great deal but do so delicately. Try to look away more when you are talking to Aboriginal people. It is rude to keep staring at someone for a long time, and Aboriginal people find constant eye-to-eye contact very uncomfortable.



Avoid visiting people while they are eating. Eating is not the social occasion or the family occasion that white people often make it. Meals are not at a set time and family members are more likely to eat when they feel like it. If you are visiting in a camp when some of the adults begin eating, sit so that you are not observing them and don't stay too long.

Avoid asking lots of questions, especially direct questions about other people, what they are doing and why they are doing it. For Aboriginal people, the wise person learns by careful observation and by personal experience, not by asking questions.

**REMEMBER:** There are other guidelines that you will need to learn for the Aboriginal community you live in, but the above are general rules you should follow until you know for sure the right way to behave. But the important thing is to respect other people and to care about them. That is more important than learning a list of rules or guidelines. You also show your respect and interest when you learn to use kinship terms and at least a few phrases in the local language.