

History of the First Australians 59

The Pearlers of the South Seas

R. T. Watts



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Acknowledgements, references, further sources, and teacher resources - visit: www.kbs.com.au/hfa-resources **Robyn P. Watts** p.1, p.3 **Dean Maynard** watercolour p.7, p.11, p.17, **Alistair Paterson** Rock art of sailing ship insert: p.15, **Shutterstock** p.5 composite image of Broome pearls and shells ID:1154749561 Elena11 and ID:1510768823 ChameleonsEye, p.9 ID:1067736203 HakBak Hammerhead shark, p.13 Pearl buttons, ID: 54341551 josefauer, p.15 Pearl luggers off Broome, ID:1046250271 Slow Walker, p.19 Divers'boots ID:1456271735 'fatamorgana-999', p.21 Boab tree in the Kimberleys, ID:1496330156 ChameleonsEye, p.23 Pearl farms ID: 163407875 electra.



The Kimberleys is at the top of Western Australia. The First Nations' People lived in many areas next to the sea. The food from the sea included seaweed, fish and shellfish. Shellfish included any seafood which was contained within a shell. One of these foods was the pearl shell. Pearls form inside the shell. These are beautiful and are wanted by many people. These special pearls are called South Seas Pearls. These pearls only grow close to Australia. First Nations' People left the pearl shells in middens on islands and the coast.



The pearl forms from a piece of sand or shell. The pearl shell covers the unwanted material in shell material. This forms a round bubble which is the pearl. The pearl grows bigger and finally, the shell gets rid of the pearl. This is similar to a skin cut or rash where it forms a scar. The pearl shell is able to form pearl material around the object to stop it hurting the pearl shell animal. This animal is called a mollusc.



Many people came to Broome searching for pearls. The first pearling people used the First Nations' People to dive for the pearls. The diver swam right down to the ocean floor to collect the pearl shells. The First Nations' People were good divers and knew the areas very well. It was hard work diving to the bottom of the sea and you had to be very strong.



Word bank

Kimberleys

Australia

pearls

buttons

beautiful

helmet

luggers

allowed

dangerous

drown

shellfish

material

object

Broome

dangerous

hammerhead

oxygen

valuable

fragment

tourists

floating

islands

Japan

Malaya

lugger

midden

mollusc

industry

Reading Recovery Level: 27

Word count: 532

Content: Information account.

ACARA F-10 references:

Learning Areas: English; Science; Humanities and Social Sciences; The Arts; Languages.

General Capabilities: Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Personal and Social Capability; Intercultural Understanding.

Cross Curriculum Priorities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures; Information non-fiction.

Teacher Notes:

The pearling industry of the Kimberleys is an intriguing story. Combined with the First Nations' People of the Kimberleys it is a story of traditional activities turning into modern industries. The First People of the Broome area were involved in the pearling industry from the beginning. This is the story of the discovery and use of pearls and pearls shells.

Discussion points for consideration:

1. How is a pearl made?
2. What was an important use for the pearl shell? How did the First Nations' People use the pearl shell?
3. Broome is the modern town which is the centre of the pearling industry. How are First Nations' people involved today in the pearling industry?

Difficult words to be introduced and practised before reading this book:

pearling, pearls, buttons, beautiful, helmet, luggers, allowed, dangerous, drown, Australia, shellfish, valuable, fragment, tourists, floating, islands, seeking, midden, mollusc, Kimberleys, material, object, Broome, hammerhead, oxygen, Japan, Malaya, Gateway, boab.

Acknowledgement of the First Nations' People: We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Sensitivity Notice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are **warned** that the following series may contain images - photographs and illustrations and text about deceased persons.

The Pearlers of the South Seas

The pearling industry of the Kimberleys is an intriguing story. Combined with the First Nations' People of the Kimberleys it is a story of traditional activities turning into modern industries. South Sea Pearls are unique to the Kimberleys in shape, lustre and colour. There are many science-related activities, as well as the history of the First Nations' Peoples involvement.

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