

Family Life

Student Information Sheet

In most societies, men and women have different roles and responsibilities. In traditional Aboriginal societies, the roles of men and women were also different. The responsibilities of women were clear and carried out without any fuss. All the men in Aboriginal societies were also aware of what was expected of them.

Traditional Aboriginal people lived their lives by the kinship system. The kinship system told them how to live their lives and how to behave towards others, as well as their obligations and responsibilities. Aboriginal people learnt about their laws and rules through traditional songs and stories, passed down through the generations.

Aboriginal Women's Roles



The traditional Aboriginal women living in the Western Desert area were very efficient when it came to food gathering. Their main task was to provide the majority of food for the family on a daily basis. Some of the food the Aboriginal women collected included a variety of plant foods such as seeds, fruits and nuts. Grass seeds were ground and made into a flour-like substance, which was then added to water to make paste. When cooked, this was known as damper or bush bread. Women also gathered small animals such as lizards, birds, snakes, grubs and insects.

It was also the women's job to prepare and cook the food they gathered. This was done quickly and efficiently, using simple utensils such as wooden dishes, stones and an open fire. Aboriginal women were also expected to raise the children and teach them about everyday life, ceremonies and what was expected of them. Children generally went with their mothers on their food gathering trips. Aboriginal children also helped to gather food, such as small birds and small lizards. They cooked them briefly in the hot ashes of a fire.

Aboriginal Men's Roles

Traditional Aboriginal men were also expected to provide food for the family. They hunted larger animals such as kangaroos, emus and large bush turkeys, and they speared fish and ran down large reptiles. The men had to be able to detect marks left by different animals and decide which direction they were travelling. The men were also responsible for cooking the food they caught. This was usually done on a large campfire, where the animal was thrown onto the flames to cook. When a large animal was caught and cooked, it was then distributed to various members of the group.

An Aboriginal man made all his own tools and weapons. He used natural materials from the environment. Spears were an important tool for hunting. They were made from wood, often with sharp bone and stone points. Boomerangs and spear throwers were also used, as well as stone axes or small stone 'knives' or 'scrapers'.

