

# Great Southern Reef

**Australian Curriculum linked educational resource**

by Ocean Imaging supported by National Geographic Society

# Acknowledgement of Country

We respect and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together.

## Lesson 1

# Totems

Indigenous connection and caring for country



Bunna Lawrie

**SEA COUNTRY**

Aboriginal Australians use **totems** to define people's **roles** and **responsibilities**, and their relationships with each other and creation.


**We asked Wadandi cultural custodian Zac Webb**

**“What is a totem?”**



GREAT  
SOUTHERN  
REEF

Zac Webb  
**TOTEMS**

A close-up photograph of a fish, likely a wrasse, with a mottled pattern of dark spots on its body and a large, prominent eye. The fish is resting on a rocky surface covered with seaweed and other marine life. The background is a soft-focus underwater scene with various shades of brown and green.

A **totem** is a natural object, plant or animal that is inherited by members of a clan or family as their spiritual emblem.



It is where you become associated with an animal and a plant, they become you and you become them. If it gets sick, you get sick.



A close-up photograph of a Southern Dumppling Bobtail Squid resting on a coral reef. The squid has a yellowish-brown body with dark spots and a prominent, glowing green eye. Its mantle is inflated, giving it a rounded, dumpling-like appearance. The background is dark and shows the texture of the coral reef.


Southern Dumppling  
**BOBTAIL SQUID**

**What's your totem?**

[Click here](#)



*The Traditional Owners of Australia  
make no distinction between land and sea  
and talk about the **concept of country** as  
seeing the environment as interconnected.*

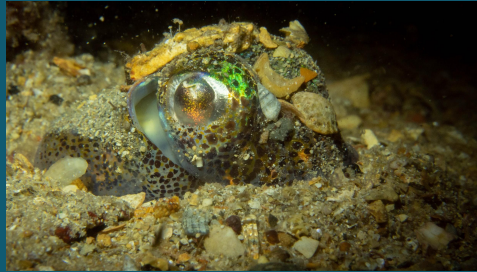
An aerial photograph of a rugged coastline at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright lens flare and casting a golden glow over the landscape. The foreground shows dark, jagged rock formations meeting the ocean, with white foam from waves crashing against the shore. The middle ground features a sandy beach and a dirt road leading inland. The background shows a flat, open landscape under a clear sky with a few distant structures.

This **stewardship** consists not only of the management of the physical resources, but also the spiritual management ceremonies necessary to ensure adequate rain and food resources at the change of each season.

Aboriginal people left safe places for their totem to live and avoided killing them.

Today, we can also protect their environment, make safe places like national parks, and putting in practices that conserve these species.

# Activity: Protecting your totem



*What's your totem?*

# Activity:

## Protecting your totem

1. For your assigned totem, use the Great Southern Reef website to find out
  - Habitat
  - Feeding
  - Predators
  - Distribution
  - Special powers
2. Write a short list of what could be done to look after your totem
3. Use your information to create a poster or presentation aimed at raising awareness about your totem.



# Inquiry questions

- What are the traditional uses to this Land on which your school stands?
- Why is Country/place so important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?
- What does 'home' or 'place' mean to you, your family and the communities that you are connected to?
- Why is it important to connect with, and care for, Country/place? Why should caring for Country be considered everyone's business, and for everyone's benefit?

# Feature Location

Tumby Bay, South Australia



Jamie Coote

**BEYOND THE BLUELINE**



An aerial photograph of a coastal town with a sandy beach and a vibrant coral reef. The water transitions from shallow turquoise near the shore to deep blue further out. The town is built on a slight rise, and the reef shows various textures and colors, including white sand patches and dark brown areas.

# Action Task

- **What are some caring for Country/place practices your school community can commit to?**

# Quiz #1 Totems

[Link](#)

Send a screenshot of your result to your teacher to confirm the completion of this lesson.