

# Ways of Thinking

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## A STUDY GUIDE

Set in the remote Central Australian Aboriginal community of Yuendumu, **WAYS OF THINKING** explores the dilemma of a young Warlpiri couple, Jean Napanangka and Alan Jungarrayi. Alan wants to move with Jean and their family to town to look for work. Jean is happy living and working in the community and does not want to go with her husband. She fears that if they leave she will not be able to perform her tribal obligations and the children will lose their language and grow up 'with too much western ways and thoughts'. The video shows how the Warlpiris maintain their language and culture in the community and the importance of adult participation in that culture to keep it alive for the children.

### WARLPIRI

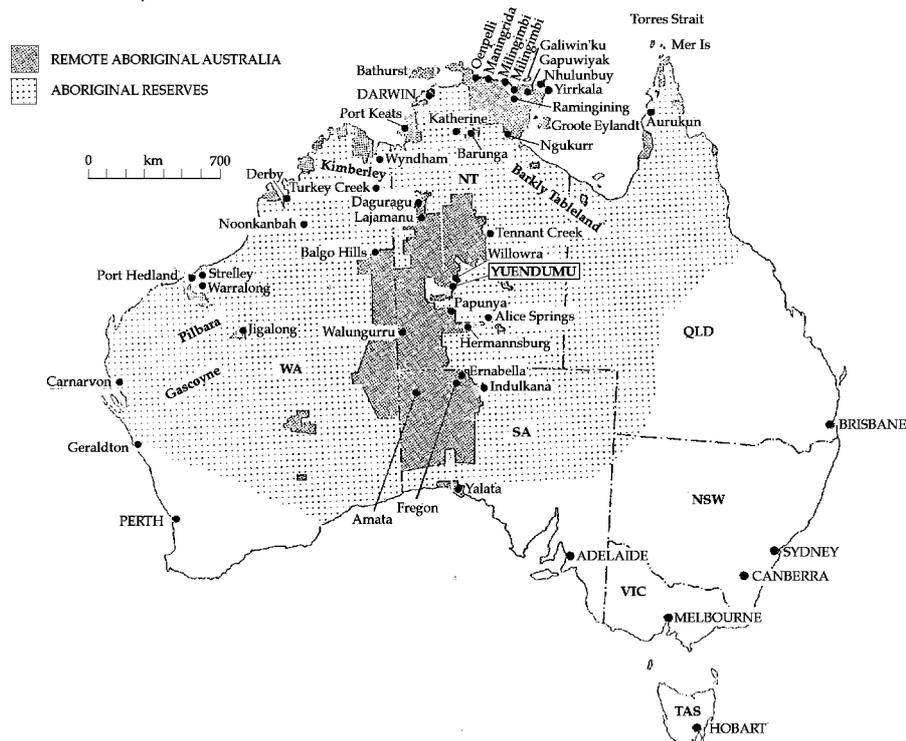
The term Warlpiri refers to a tribe of people, some of who live in Yuendumu. It is also the name of the language they speak.

Warlpiri is one of only forty surviving Aboriginal languages. As Ned Jampijinpa, the male narrator says, *"When white fellas arrived in Australia there were two hundred Aboriginal languages, only forty of these survive today. The rest are dying or lost forever"*.

# YUENDUMU

YUENDUMU is two hundred and seventy (270) kilometres north west of Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. It is a desert community of around nine hundred mainly Warlpiri people.

MAP ABORIGINAL RESERVES AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES



## WHAT HAPPENS IN THE TAPE

1. A group of Aboriginal women wind their way between large boulders, they are telling a story as they walk. It is the story of how the rocks got to be in that place. A female narrator, Bess Nungarrayi, tells us that these women are Warlpiri people and that they are speaking their Warlpiri language.
2. After the title of the tape **WAYS OF THINKING** we see scenes of life in Yuendumu. A male narrator, Ned Jampijinpa, tells us that, *"When white fellas arrived in Australia there were two hundred Aboriginal languages...only forty of these survive today...the rest are dying or lost forever"*.

3. Young boys ask, "What is your name?". They want to know what is your *skin* name.
4. A group of Aboriginal people sit together talking as Jean Napanangka points to various people in the group teaching her little daughter Samara Nakamarra their skin names. Every Warlpiri person has a skin name and that name dictates how that person relates to every other person in the Warlpiri tribe as well as people outside the tribe. People are born into a skin group which depends upon the skin names of their parents. Men's skin names begin with J and women's with N.

There are eight skin groups:

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>
JAPANGARDI	NAPANGARDI
JAPANANGKA	NAPANANGKA
JAPALJARRI	NAPALJARRI
JUNGARRAYI	NUNGARRAYI
JUPURRULA	NAPURRULA
JANGALA	NANGALA
JAMPIJINPA	NAMPIJINPA
JAKAMARRA	NAKAMAMMA

The skin system is only part of a more intricate system - the kin system. As the female narrator says, "These systems relate us to each other and to the sky, the clouds, the desert, the trees, the rocks, the plants, the animals and ... *Jukurrpa*". *Jukurrpa* is the law, the dreaming, the rituals, a body of knowledge.

5. Ned Jampijinpa explains that his daughter Jessica is a Nangala because he is a Jampijinpa and his wife Judith is a Napangardi. Judith was his first skin choice of marriage according to the law - i.e. his second cousin. He tells us, "Children are told from an early age which skin groups they can marry into".
6. Samara Nakamarra and her brother Abraham Jakamarra watch a game of local Australian rules football with their parents Jean Napanangka and Alan Jungarrayi.

- 7.** Alan Jungarrayi goes to the Warlpiri Media Association building where Francis Jupurrurla is editing a local football match for the Warlpiri news. He tells Francis Jupurrurla that he wants to go to town to get a job. Francis encourages him to stay in the community with his family and to stay for the fire ceremony which is coming up. Francis is worried that he might, *"Get into grog in town"*.
- 8.** Jean Napanangka, Alan Jungarrayi's wife, talks to some of the women in her family about Alan's proposed move to town and she tells of her reasons for wanting to stay in the community. She wants to be able to do her part in tribal ceremonies such as initiation ceremonies.
- 9.** Jean Napanangka, Alan Jungarrayi, Ned Jampijinpa, Judith Napangardi and children collect firewood whilst we are told about family obligations. Ned's voice over tells us, *"There are no words for 'please' or 'thank you' in the Warlpiri language. Certain people in the kin system can ask you to do things for them or give them things. You are obliged by the law to do so. In turn, you can ask other certain people to do something for you."* Some of the wood is given to Peggy Nampijinpa. She is Alan Jungarrayi's mother-in-law and he is obliged by the law to provide for her.
- 10.** Peggy Nampijinpa wants to talk to Alan Jungarrayi but tribal law does not allow her to speak directly to her son-in-law. So she asks Douglas Japanangka, a special person for Alan in the Warlpiri kin system, to talk to him for her. She wants him to know that the women are worried that Jean Napanangka and the children will become too involved in western ways if they go to town. They could lose their Warlpiri identity and thus their place in the world.
- 11.** Alan Jungarrayi is sitting with a group of men who are playing cards when Douglas Japanangka arrives to talk to him.
- 12.** Abraham Jakamarra, Jean and Alan's son and Peggy Nampijinpa's grandson, and three other boys play football at Wayililinyapa outstation. Abraham goes to school here because it is the place of Peggy's dreaming - her country. She says, *"I belong to this place"*. She tells us that it was her father's country and that it is Abraham's country too and he likes to go to school here. The story of Wayililinyapa is the fire dreaming.

- 13.** Jack Jampijinpa tells a group of children the story of the fire dreaming. Ned Jampijinpa in voice over tells us that, *“Traditional knowledge held by old people is passed onto the right people at the appropriate time. People know or own information of the dreaming for which they are custodians. It is their responsibility to remember correctly.”*
- 14.** A group of women sit on the ground watching some other women teaching a young girl a dance. Bess Nungarrayi tells us in voice over, *“Owning in an Aboriginal sense implies obligation rather than possession. Our children understand this. Our children learn by looking and doing, not by asking questions. As in all rituals, there are two groups of people involved in this dance; the ‘Kirda’, owners or bosses of the dance, and the ‘Kurdungurlu’, the helpers whose responsibility it is to make sure that the story is correct. They stage-manage events telling of the dreamtime stories”*. There is some dialogue between the groups of women and Bess explains that, *“What has just happened is that the ‘Kurdungurlu’ have directed the next movement”*.
- 15.** A group of adults and children are making a video called ‘Manyu-wana’. They are making this video program to teach kids to learn good Warlpiri language. A series of ‘Manyu-wana’ programs has been shown on national television.
- 16.** Jean Napanangka works part-time at the Literacy Centre in the community.



She writes down stories of the dreaming in Warlpiri and in English and the kids read them in school. In the school there are Warlpiri and non-Aboriginal teachers. The kids are taught in Warlpiri to grade three and then in Warlpiri and English.

- 17.** Ned Jampijinpa, Jean Napanangka, Alan Jungarrayi and little Samara Nakamarra sit at their camp. Alan is asking Ned if he can get a ride into town with him tomorrow. They decide on a time and place. This upsets Jean who grabs Samara and walks off.
- 18.** When Jean goes to work she tells her co-workers that she is upset and that she is staying and does not want to go to town. They agree with her saying that there are many fights in town and too much grog. They too worry that the children Abraham and Samara will forget their dreaming and their language.
- 19.** Ned Jampijinpa sets up a camera to do a community news broadcast - this is a one person operation. We see his family in their camp watching the news and the video footage we saw being recorded at the beginning of the tape. It is the women walking among the rocks at Juka Juka, the place of the rain dreaming. Bess Nungarrayi in voice over tells us, *"The camera is looking at the feet, showing that the women are stepping in the same spot as the person before, following the track of our ancestors"*. As they walk the women tell the story, *"The rain was travelling from the east to the west throwing out rainclouds, falling as it went, calling as it went. Red rain fell at Juka Juka and created clouds which appear as rocks."*
- 20.** *"When a person finishes up or dies, their personal name is not spoken. All other people who have the same name become 'Kumunjayi', which means 'no name'. This taboo also applies to images of the people which must be destroyed"*. We see Ned Jampijinpa and another media worker labelling a video tape to warn people that they should not view it because there is an image of a dead man in it. Bess Nungarrayi tells us, *"Deceased people are then referred to by their skin name only, which relates them back to the tribe and the land. This makes sure that there are no individual heroes in the culture."*
- 21.** In the last scene we see Alan Jungarrayi packing and leaving to go to town. Jean Napanangka is pleading with him to stay and she and the women ask, *"When will you be back?"*.

## ISSUES RAISED IN “WAYS OF THINKING”

### LANGUAGE

*“When white fellas arrived in Australia there were two hundred Aboriginal languages, only forty of these survive today...the rest are dying or lost forever.”*

Aboriginal children were forbidden to speak their own languages at school until as recently as the 1970s. They were severely punished if they disobeyed. Such a practice contributed to the widespread Aboriginal language dispossession.

Tim Shopen, a linguist at the Australian National University writes, *“Ecologists stress the importance of genetic diversity. The different languages of the world are vehicles for different ways of thinking. Speakers of local languages can be bilingual and speak a majority language as well as their own, and their culture and thought can be a resource for the whole society. With pride in their cultural identity they can make the most positive contribution to the larger community.”*

Throughout the tape we see the endeavours of the Warlpiri people to save their Aboriginal language.

### QUESTIONS

1. Why do Warlpiri people consider it important to maintain their own language?
2. What are the Warlpiri people doing to ensure that their language survives?
3. How many Aboriginal languages existed before *“white fellas arrived in Australia”* and why do you think they became extinct?

### KINSHIP SYSTEM

The Warlpiri kinship system appears extremely complex to non-Aboriginal students of the language who have described it as ‘the passion and the genius of the Warlpiri people’. It is a model for the universe and a person’s place in it as well as a guide for social conduct, exchange and obligation. It has many more kin terms available to refer to a larger number of relationships than has the kinship system of English speaking Australians.

Kin relations dictate how people relate to each other. In the program we are told about rules for marriage partners; for speaking directly to another; for avoidance; and obligation. We are told in the wood collecting scene that Alan Jungarrayi is obliged to provide for Peggy Nampijinpa, his mother-in-law, who also by law is not allowed to speak directly to Alan because he is her son-in-law.

The skin system is the basis for marriage rules. These were necessary in the past for small groups of people living in very close proximity to one another and continue to be so although now they are more flexible and 'love matches' are not uncommon.

*"Children are told from an early age which skin groups they can marry into."* The following is a chart of first marriage choices for Warlpiri people and the skin names of the children of those marriages.

<u>MALE</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>CHILD - (J) Male (N) Female</u>
JAPANANGKA	NAPURRULA	J/NAPANGARDI
JUPURRULA	NAPANANGKA	J/NAKAMARRA
JUNGARRAYI	NANGALA	J/NAPALJARRI
JANGALA	NUNGARRAYI	J/NAMPIJINPA
JAPALJARRI	NAKAMAMMA	J/NUNGARRAYI
JAKAMARRA	NAPALJARRI	JU/NAPURRULA
JAMPIJINPA	NAPANGARDI	J/NANGALA
JAPANGARDI	NAMPIJINPA	J/NAPANANGKA

Alan Jungarrayi and Jean Napanangka are third choice marriage partners: therefore strictly speaking their son Abraham is a Jakamarra and a Japaljarri and their daughter Samara is a Nakamarra and a Napaljarri.

The director of the video program and the crew had to be assigned skin names so that Warlpiri people had a guide for interaction with them.

## QUESTIONS

1. What are your kin relationships? What obligations do you have to those people and what are their obligations to you?
2. Do your relationships with your kin vary from the kinship system of the Warlpiri people? Explain how they vary.
3. What is Alan Jungarrayi's relationship to Peggy Nampijinpa and how does that affect how they can relate to each other?
4. Using the first choice marriage chart work out the skins names of the grandparents of Jean Napanangka.

## JUKURRPA

Jukurrpa is the law, the dreaming, the rituals, a body of knowledge. As Bess Nungarrayi says of the skin/kin system, *“These systems relate us to each other and to the sky, the clouds, the desert, the trees, the rocks, the plants, the animals and ... Jukurrpa.”* Jukurrpa binds people and the world of nature into one interfunctioning world. Jukurrpa is not consigned to the past but is a lived daily experiences.

Learning the dances, language, stories and the kinship system is to begin to learn the law. Jean Napanangka and the women worry that Samara and Abraham won't learn these things if they go to town.

## QUESTIONS

1. What does Jukurrpa mean?
2. How do you see the children being taught Jukurrpa in this video program?

## KUMUNJAYI

At the beginning of the program there is a warning in Warlpiri language and in English. It says, *“This video contains images of Warlpiri people, caution should be exercised in viewing, as some of these images may be of deceased people”.* As Ned Jampijinpa and a media worker erase an image from a video they have made we are told, *“When a person finished up or dies, their personal name is not spoken. All other people who have the same name become ‘Kumunjayi’, which means ‘no name’. This taboo also applies to images of the people, which must be destroyed ... deceased people are then referred to by their skin name only, which relates them back to the tribe and the land. This makes sure that there are no individual heroes in the culture”.* This does not refer to skin names but to christian or personal names. Even names that sound similar or place names have to be changed. Direct reference to a deceased person will cause grief to the close extended family and will offend all Warlpiri people.

## QUESTIONS

1. What is the attitude of Warlpiri people towards their dead as discussed in the video?
2. How does this attitude differ from non-Aboriginal Australian attitudes?

## COMMUNITY TELEVISION

National television is beamed into the remote community of Yuendumu by satellite to a relay station. This station is run by the Warlpiri Media Association who choose what television programs are relayed to the community. However, for an hour or so in the evening the national television program is interrupted for the local community news. Early in **WAYS OF THINKING** there is a scene (see 7, page 4) in which Francis Jupurrurla is editing a football match to show on the news and in the opening scene (see 1, page 2), we see him with his camera, videoing the women telling the story at Juka Juka. We later see that scene on the Warlpiri news (see 19, page 6). In this way the Warlpiri people have used technology to transmit images of themselves involved in both modern and traditional culture. This means that all the images of people they see on television are not white non-Aboriginal people involved in mainstream Australian or American culture.

## QUESTIONS

1. Outline the part that community television plays in the lives of Warlpiri people.
2. How does Warlpiri news differ from national Australian news?
3. What activities do you see being performed by media workers at the Warlpiri Media Association?

## THE SCHOOL

In school the kids are taught only in Warlpiri language to grade three and then in Warlpiri and English. This is a bilingual education system. A literacy centre provides material for teaching Warlpiri. This is where Jean Napanangka works, writing down stories which to date have only been passed down orally. Not all teaching happens in the school. The children are taught stories by Jack Jampijinpa (see 13, page 5) by drawing a picture in the dust and by the women teaching the young girl to dance (see 14, page 5).

## QUESTIONS

1. To what grade are the children taught only in Warlpiri language and why do you think this is the case?