## Year 9/10 Visual Arts

## Design Analysis and Drawing Task — Tagai Calendar

**Suggested duration:** Two lessons

## Summary

In this activity, students will explore the design, content and purpose of Tommy Pau’s artwork, ‘Tagai Calendar’. They will answer analysis questions on the **Activity** **worksheet** and design their own unique set of symbols to represent seasonal changes in their own lives.

*Traditionally, Torres Strait Islander fishermen worked out the ebb and flow of the tides by the position of Tagai, especially when sailing at night with a steady wind but little visibility. As the tide changed it would alter the boats’ course. Unless the sailors watched the stars they might not notice they were going off-course. As Tagai’s spear points to the South Pole, they could correct the course as the tidal direction change* (The Little Red Yellow Black Book, p. 18).

**Learning outcomes**

1. Students willexplore the influences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and demonstrate their understanding in their responses to the analysis questions.
2. Students willplan and design artworks that represent artistic intention in their drawing task.

## General capabilities Cross-curriculum priorities

Literacy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

Critical and creative thinking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures organising ideas: 1, 2, 3, 5, 8

Ethical understanding

**Australian Curriculum content descriptions**

**Years 9 and 10 Visual Arts**

Analyse a range of visual artworks from contemporary and past times to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their visual art-making, starting with Australian artworks, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and consider international artworks (ACAVAR131).

Conceptualise and develop representations of themes, concepts or subject matter to experiment with their developing personal style, reflecting on the styles of artists, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists (ACAVAM125).

Plan and design artworks that represent artistic intention (ACAVAM128).

## Provisions for differentiation

## Learning Support

Students with special learning needs may take a series of photos to use as symbolic of the seasonal changes in their own lives.

**Extension** Students could collaborate to host an exhibit of their work at a designated shared space within the school.

## Resources

* **Activity worksheet**
* 2B pencils
* Drawing paper (or copy paper)
* Image of the Tagai Calendar on page 17-18 of *The Little Red Yellow Black Book — an introduction to Indigenous Australia* (4th edition), ‘Who we are’, Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS, Canberra, 2018. Online image can be viewed at https://umbrella.org.au/product/tagai-calendar/

## For teachers

Ensure that the guidance notes included in *The Little Red Yellow Black Book* teacher resource have been considered.

**Vocabulary**

The Dreaming – Note that the Dreaming is an Australian Aboriginal concept. Torres Strait Islanders believe in and are connected to one another by Ancestral Heroes, ancestral beings who criss-crossed the Torres Strait.

*For Aboriginal people, the Dreaming refers to a number of things. In one sense it is the creation period (a time beyond human memory) when ancestral beings spread across the continent, creating all of the plants, animals and humans, establishing societies and entrust­ing them with the Law — the rules for living, languages, customs and ceremonies* (The Little Red Yellow Black Book, p.12).

Preparation: **Step 1** Make copies of the **Activity worksheet** — one for each student. Project an online image of the Tagai Calendar.

**Step 2** Read and discuss key points from the following extract from *The Little Red Yellow Black Book* pp. 17-18about the ancestral hero, Tagai.

*Torres Strait Islanders believed in and are connected to one another by Ancestral Heroes, ancestral beings who criss-crossed the Torres Strait. Through them, Torres Strait Islanders are linked to each other and to the peoples of southern New Guinea and northern Queensland. The Ancestral Heroes gave Torres Strait Islanders laws to live by and laws that taught respect for each other, the earth and the sea. Some of the ancestors were said to be shape-shifters — at times human, at other times animal, reptile, bird or fish. This ability allowed the ancestor to dwell in, and travel through, water, earth, oil, sea and air. Like these beings, Torres Strait Islanders understand themselves to be intimately connected to the land and sea environments that are their home. These connections are everyday ones that are reinforced through fishing, gardening and turtle and dugong hunting. Some Heroes turned into places in the sea, land or sky. Today, for example, Torres Strait Islanders look up to the warrior Tagai in the night skies. Depending on his position, they know when the seasonal rains will come and when they should plant crops. When Tagai’s left hand (the Southern Cross) moves towards the sea the season’s first rain, Kuki, begins.*

*Traditionally, Torres Strait Islander fishermen worked out the ebb and flow of the tides by the position of Tagai, especially when sailing at night with a steady wind but little visibility. As the tide changed it would alter the boats’ course. Unless the sailors watched the stars they might not notice they were going off-course. As Tagai’s spear points to the South Pole, they could correct the course as the tidal direction changed. Tagai also warns of monsoons and predicts the seasons. Crop success is dependent on the Torres Strait Islanders following Tagai’s path and mapping their planting and harvesting to his movements.*

*DID YOU KNOW? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been described as the world’s first astronomers. Dreaming stories in various locations throughout the country explain tides, eclipses, the rising and setting of the sun and moon, and planetary movements throughout the year. Research is also being conducted into whether stories can help to locate astronomical events such as comets and meteors.*

**Step 3** Display an image of the artwork, ‘Tagai Calendar’ by Torres Strait Islander artist, Tommy Pau.

**Step 4** Direct students’ attention to the **Activity worksheet** analysis task and have them match the answers to the questions about the artwork. Assign 5-10 minutes for students to complete this task.

**Step 5:** Work through the answers to the activity by reading them out to the group after the assigned work time.

**Step 6:** Direct students to work on the Drawing Task described on the **Activity worksheet**. They may need additional class time to complete this task.

**Assessment ideas**

Completed worksheets

Assess using the criteria for the art project

**Answers**

1. To represent the cycle of the seasons and the curve of the Earth’s surface.
2. Plant life; aquatic life; living things in the air
3. The astronomical position of the Tagai constellation in the sky.
4. The Southern Cross
5. It may represent the human vantage point from which Tagai’s movements are viewed
6. Tides, currents, wind, water, clouds or direction
7. September
8. October
9. February
10. Summer