

Big Question: Where is Uluru and how did it get its unique shape and colour?

Uluru, previously known as Ayers Rock, is a breathtaking natural wonder located in the heart of Australia.

Did you know Uluru is the biggest rock in the world? It also has an incredible Aboriginal history that we will learn about.



Uluru is found in the southern part of the Northern Territory, within Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park and the Central Australian Desert.

The park boasts **pristine** springs, hidden waterholes, and ancient rock caves.



The two main **geological features** of the national park are Uluru, and Kata-Tjuta (The Olgas).

Uluru was formed over 550 million years ago. It is an 'island mountain' that was originally submerged under the ocean. This iconic rock formation is made of a type of rock called sandstone, which contains lots of sand.

Uluru's interesting formation was shaped by millions of years of **erosion** and natural forces like wind, rain, and temperature changes. This erosion has resulted in various features on Uluru's surface, including caves, **crevices**, and the distinct curves on the rock's surface.

The unique reddish-brown colour comes from iron minerals in the rock. Iron is a type of metal, which rusts over time and creates the red colours through the rock.

As the sun moves across the sky, Uluru's appearance changes, creating a magical display of colours. At sunrise and sunset, it can glow with brilliant oranges and reds.



Uluru is a place of wonder, beauty, and deep **cultural importance** for the Aboriginal people who live around it. Exploring its unique shape and colour allows us to learn about the incredible forces of nature that formed it over millions of years.

Big Question: Why is Uluru special to the traditional owners, the Anangu people?

Uluru, often seen as just a massive **geological formation**, is far more than meets the eye. It is extremely important to the Indigenous people who have called this land home for thousands of years. The Pitjantjatjara, part of the Anangu (arn-ung-oo) people, have inhabited the region around Uluru for over 30,000 years. For the Anangu people, Uluru is a **sacred** place.



The Anangu people have a deep **connection** to their land through something very special called "Tjukurpa" (chook-orr-pa). Imagine that Tjukurpa is like a special book that tells you all the things you need to learn in your life. In the same way, the Anangu people's way of life is learnt through "Tjukurpa".

"Tjukurpa" is a special **belief** that connects the Anangu people to the environment and their **ancestors**. It is not written down in books, it is passed on by heart, through oral stories, dances and **ceremonies**.

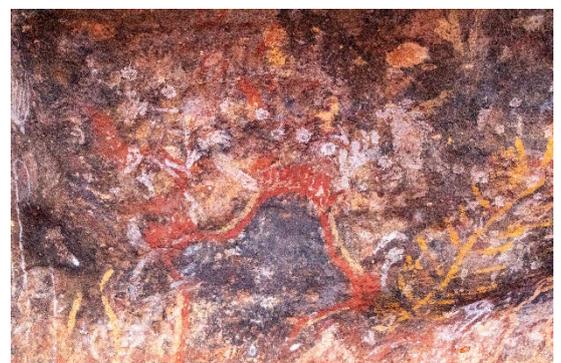


Tjukurpa stories are Dreaming Stories. They take us back to the very beginning of time, telling stories of how the world was created. These stories also teach the Anangu people important **knowledge** about the land, how to survive in the desert, and how to behave properly.

Tjukurpa stories are like treasure maps. They show where important places are, how to travel from one place to another, and where and when to find water, food and medicine from plants and animals.

The Tjukurpa Dreaming stories related to Uluru are carefully passed on to the younger generation. With this **knowledge**, every Anangu person knows they have a **responsibility** to care for and respect their land and everything in it. The Tjukurpa is central to the **cultural identity** of the Anangu people.

You will now get a chance to read a Tjukurpa Dreaming story to help you to understand the lessons they teach the Anangu people.



Anangu Ceremonial Rock Art in Uluru
Kata-Juta National Park

Big Question: What is the natural ecosystem that exists in the Uluru Kata Tjuta National Park and how did the Anangu care for it?



The Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park has a unique natural **ecosystem**, perfectly **adapted** to the **arid** (very dry), sandy conditions of the Central Australian desert. Here, life survives in tough conditions where extremely hot days contrast with very cold nights and extremely low rainfall.

The desert ecosystem of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is no **barren wasteland**. It is home to more than 400 different plants! The park's **vegetation** supports a huge variety of wildlife including birds, mammals, and reptiles.



Red Kangaroos



Thorny Devil



King Brown Snake

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is included on the UNESCO **World Heritage** List for both its natural and cultural values. The park was first added to the list in 1987, when the international community recognised its spectacular geological formations, rare plants and animals, and outstanding natural beauty.

The Anangu people have taken care of the ecosystem of Uluru-Kata Tjuta for thousands of years. Over this time, the people learned how to live in this tough environment.

The Anangu burned patches of land which helped fruit trees and vegetable plants grow more food for them. They hunted and ate kangaroos and sweet, delicious honey ants. They **utilised** wood and leaves from mulga trees for making spears, cooking and shelters. Even though they used **materials** from their ecosystem, they were careful not to destroy it, or take too much of anything. We can learn much from the way the Anangu **maintained** the vegetation and wildlife around them.



The desert ecosystem of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, **intertwined** with Anangu traditions, shows how nature can adapt to harsh conditions and how people can take what they need from an area while also caring for it.

Big Question: What kinds of flora (plants) and fauna (animals) thrive in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park? Why is this area important for nature?



Uluru's arid ecosystem is a place where **unique flora** and **fauna thrive**. The Anangu identify six different types of **habitats** in and around Uluru.

Puli is the rocky habitat. Its **gorges** and stony slopes are a **haven** for fauna including wallaroos,

wallabies, echidnas and birds like falcons and kestrels who take shelter and drink water around the rock. **Hardy** plants that grow in shallow, dry soils are found here.



Karu, the creek habitat, includes creeks and waterholes. Although the creeks are normally dry, waterholes hold water for months providing both drinking water for animals and ideal **breeding sites** for frogs. Bloodwood and river red gum trees grow in Karu.

Mulga trees and acacia shrubs **dominate Puti**, the flat, dry, open woodland habitat around Uluru. After rain, shallow **claypans** are formed in the hard ground: sweet relief for thirsty animals! Tough grasses in this area provide homes for honey ants and small mammals such as the spinifex hopping mouse. Red kangaroos and emus eat the grassy plants in Puti.



Puti habitat



Acacia scrub



Mulga tree



Red kangaroos

Tali, the **sand dune** habitat is home to spinifex and green shrubs. Small animals burrow into the sand to protect themselves and emerge after rain. The marsupial mole and small lizards called skinks call this habitat home.

Pila, the grassland habitat, includes the low areas between **sand dunes**. Many desert oak grow in Pila. Trees and hardy shrubs such as the umbrella bush, honey grevillea and bloodwood provide seeds for animals to eat.



Spinifex grass

The six Anangu habitats contain all living things in and around Uluru. Flora give shelter and food to fauna, and fauna help flora grow by spreading their seeds. This balance is essential to maintain the health of the arid desert ecosystem.

Nyaru: the sixth habitat

After a fire, Pila and Tali transform into the burnt habitat called Nyaru. After the burning season, animals are drawn to Nyaru because lots of delicious food plants, like seed grasses and succulents, start growing again. Animals like the fresh green shoots as the habitats regrow.

In Nyaru, you can find unique plants and animals, such as the Tarkawara, which is a little mouse that can hop like a kangaroo. There's also the Tjantjalka, a military dragon lizard. The Kampurarpa is a desert raisin fruit that grows in the desert and is tasty to eat. Last but not least, the Wiriny-Wirinyapa is a round fruit called a bush tomato that is used in making delicious meals.



Comprehension Questions - Chapter 4

1. What makes the flora and fauna around Uluru unique?
2. What habitats exist in the arid desert ecosystem of Uluru?
3. Why is the Puli, rocky habitat, important for fauna?
4. For which animal are the waterholes in Karu or the creek habitat especially important? Why?
5. What fauna can be found in Puti, the woodland habitat?
6. Describe the flora found in Pila, the grassland habitat?
7. How do animals find protection in Tali, the sand dune habitat?
8. What is Nyaru? Why is this habitat important for flora and fauna?



Big Question: What are the positive and negative impacts of tourism on Uluru?

People from all over the world visit Uluru. **Tourism** in the area has many benefits. It supports local families by providing them with tourism jobs. Locals work in places like hotels, restaurants, and as tour guides. Tourists spend lots of money which helps the local community.



Some of the money made from **tourism** goes towards **preserving** Uluru and its surroundings, including the plants and animals of Uluru Kata-Tjuta National Park. This money is also used to fix any harm caused by visitors.

When tourists come to Uluru, they learn about the natural features of the National Park along with the indigenous Anangu culture. They learn about why Uluru is a **sacred** place and hear traditional stories passed down through generations.



Yulara lookout - Uluru

Tourism also has negative impacts on Uluru and its people. Uluru holds deep cultural and sacred importance for the Anangu people. Unfortunately, not all tourists understand this. This lack of understanding can sometimes lead to **unintentional** disrespect.

One example of this was seen in the past. Years ago, climbing to the top of Uluru was a popular tourist activity. While looking like harmless fun, the Anangu people were saddened and angered by the activity. No one asked for permission to climb the sacred, special rock. It even caused damage to the rock's surface and increased **erosion**. Recognising the cultural and environmental concerns, the government banned climbing in 2019. This was an important step in preserving Uluru and respecting its people.



The delicate desert **ecosystem** around Uluru faces challenges due to the high number of visitors. Constant foot traffic, littering and **pollution**, can harm the natural environment, putting strain on local flora and fauna.



Big Question: How and why should we protect Uluru and its environment?



Visiting Uluru is magical. It's something all Australians should do if they can. However, when we visit Uluru, we're not just visitors - we're also protectors.

Did you know that tourist areas around the world can be harmed, or totally destroyed, by visitors? Uluru is at risk of harm if we are not careful to **protect** it.

There are many ways we can protect Uluru for **generations** to come: conservation, **sustainable tourism** and education.

Environmental Conservation

Conservation efforts are crucial for protecting the environment around Uluru. This includes stopping the introduction of **invasive** plants and animals which may harm local plants and wildlife, keeping a watchful eye on the health of native flora and fauna, and reducing pollution to keep the air and water clean.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is essential in protecting Uluru's natural beauty. Visitors should have minimal impact on the environment and important cultural places. Tourists can do this by taking their litter with them after they leave and bringing only allowed items into the area. Protecting this magnificent area also includes not climbing Uluru, walking on marked pathways, and not touching or disrupting sacred areas. These actions also show respect to the local Anangu people.



Governments also limit the number of visitors allowed to visit Uluru at any one time to stop overcrowding.

Education

Education plays an important role in protecting Uluru's ecosystem. When tourists visit Uluru, they must be educated about how to respect its environment. Learning about the Anangu people's history, stories, and **customs** is important for respecting their culture, but also helps in protecting Uluru's environment (remember- they cared for the area for thousands of years, so have knowledge about how to conserve it!).



Anangu grain grinding - Uluru 1985