

Rosita's Page: Aboriginal Language and Australian English

Take a look at “Nyangumarta,” an Aboriginal language here used in a speech prepared by an Aboriginal man named Bruce Thomas. <http://www.fatsil.org/LOTM/mar03.htm>

Here are some things that you can notice about languages. Give the answers for Nyangumarta:

1. Do words generally contain one syllable, more than one syllable, or a mix?
2. Do the words contain more vowels or more consonants, or are vowels and consonants used about equally?
3. What alphabet and numerical digits are used to write Nyangumarta? Why do you think this is so?
4. Compare the two sentences in the first paragraph of Bruce's speech. Which uses more punctuation—English or Nyangumarta?
5. Locate the date in each first paragraph; locate the city name. What do you think the other words might mean?

English is the official language of Australia, but some of the English words used by Australians are quite colorful. Other words, such as kangaroo and boomerang, are unique because the objects they describe are Australian in origin. Still others have different meanings than in the U.S.A. Use a search engine to find “Australian English.”

Find the meaning of these words, then write a silly sentence using all the words in each group.

1. Aussie, Oz, Yank, yonks:
2. arvo, barbie, station, tea:
3. billabong, bunyip, swag, waltzing Matilda:
4. chuck a U-ey, gaol, roo bar, bush:
5. dillybag, flaming, hooley, mate:
6. Joe Bloggs, fair dinkum, quids, QANTAS:

Australian English Glossary
(In case an Internet search is not practical)

Aussie (pronounced “Ozzie”): an Australian
arvo: afternoon
barbie: barbecue
billabong: waterhole in a dry riverbed
bunyip: mythical bush spirit associated with rivers; used with an overtone of cuteness
bush: the countryside; far away from the city
chuck a U-ey: make a U-turn
damper: loaf of bread made in outdoor oven
didgeridoo: flute-type instrument played by Aboriginal men
dillybag: small bag to carry things in
fair dinkum: honest, genuine
flaming: “very,” all purpose intensifying adjective
gaol: Aussie and British word for “jail”
hooley: wild party
Joe Bloggs: the average citizen—like John Doe
loo: lavatory or toilet
mate: friend, or the person you’re talking to
outback: the bush; uncivilized or uninhabited region
Oz: Australia
QANTAS: acronym for Queensland And Northern Territory Aerial Service
quids: a lot of money
roo bar: metal rail on vehicle to protect against kangaroos
station: large farm or ranch
swag: canvas-covered bedroll used in the outback
tea: evening meal
telly: television
to waltz Matilda: to carry a swag
Yank: American
yonks: ages, a long time