



Teacher Reference Document 6



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Unit 2: How British laws and principles, including the rule of law, were brought to Australia by the First Fleet in 1788 and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – Year 4 - Civics and Citizenship (C & C) Strand: Laws and Citizens

Topic 4.2: A conflict of laws and perspectives

Captain (Lieutenant) Cook's instructions

James Cook's first voyage to Australia in the Endeavour in 1770 was originally commissioned by a scientific body, the Royal Society, as a voyage of exploration and scientific discovery. Cook was to sail to Tahiti to use special telescopes to observe the planet Venus crossing the sun, and make astronomical observations that would help [measure the size of the solar system](#).

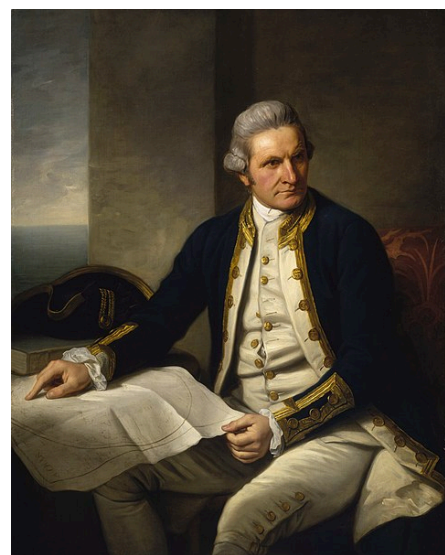
When the British Government found out about Cook's proposed voyage, it decided to support it too, but for other reasons. Britain's sea-power, through its navy and its trading ships, had made it rich and powerful. This was an era in which Britain was seeking to expand its Empire, competing with other European countries to obtain valuable minerals (such as gold and silver), goods (such as sugar, spices, tobacco) and land to form new colonies. The British wanted Cook to explore and map lands not yet 'discovered' by Europeans, to open up new trade routes and to claim new colonies before the Dutch, the French and the Portuguese did so.

Cook was given a set of [secret instructions](#), written on 30 July 1768, which were to be opened by him once he was at sea. They talked of Britain's role as a 'maritime power' and how exploring and mapping distant parts of the world would help improve trade and navigation. Cook was told to sail to Tahiti, to view the '[transit of Venus](#)', and then to head south and then west, in search of a great southern continent, unless he ran into New Zealand first, which he should also properly explore and map. Cook did reach New Zealand first, which he mapped in detail, but then sailed further west until he came across the coast of what we now call Australia, but which was then known as 'New Holland'.

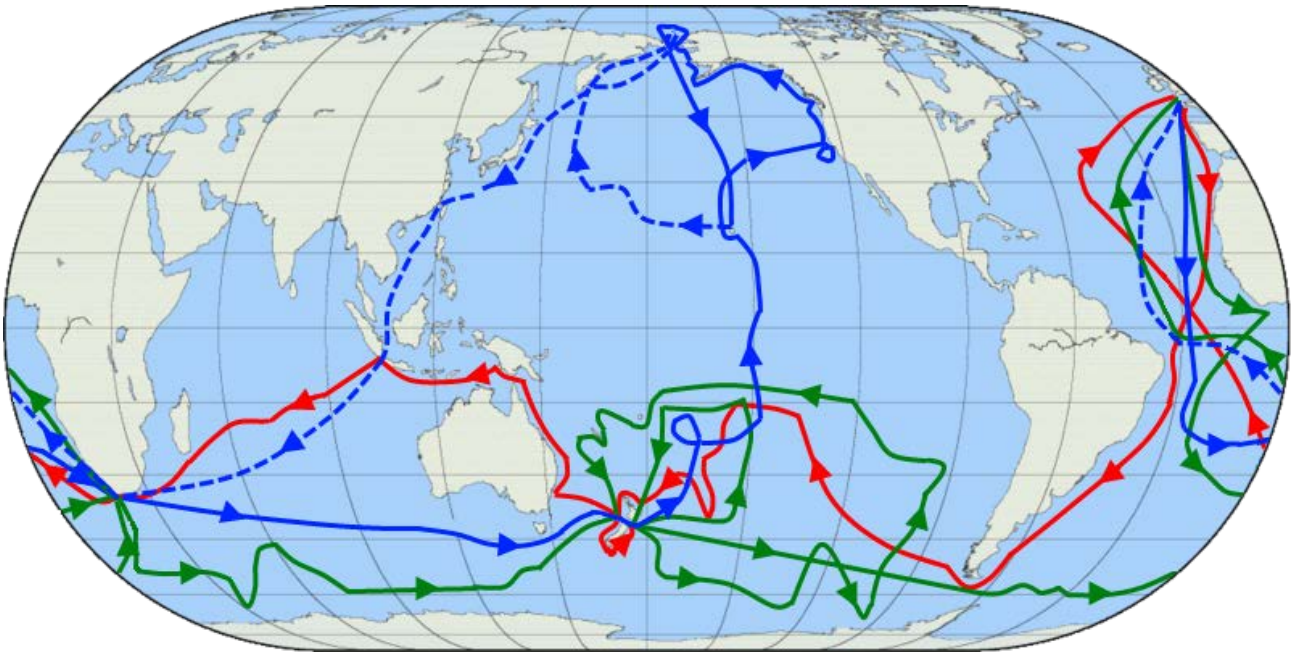
Cook's instructions told him to draw maps of the coast, including making charts of bays and harbours. He was also to study the soil, plants, animals, birds and fish to be found there, as well as to try to identify minerals and valuable stones. He was to bring home seeds, fruits and grains so they could be further studied.

Instructions on the treatment of Indigenous peoples

Cook was asked also to study any people, described in the Instructions as 'the natives', who lived in the places he explored. He was asked to assess their numbers and what they were like. He was told to seek 'by all proper means to cultivate a friendship and alliance with them' by giving them gifts they may value, asking them to trade and showing them 'every kind of civility and regard' (ie being polite, friendly and respectful to them). But he was also warned to be on his guard and not to be taken by surprise.



James Cook held the rank of Lieutenant when he voyaged to Australia, but was known as 'Captain Cook' because he was in charge of a ship.
Source: Wiki Commons



Map of Cook's Three Voyages
Source: Wiki Commons

Cook was instructed that, 'with the consent of the Natives', he should take possession in the King's name of 'convenient situations in the country'. Alternatively, if he found the country 'uninhabited', he should take possession for Britain by 'setting up proper marks and inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors'. Cook was told to record the position of any islands that had not previously been discovered by Europeans and take possession, on behalf of the King, of those that 'appear to be of consequence' (ie they had some importance or value). Claims of 'possession' were aimed at warding off other European colonial powers. It was a competition among them for new colonies with little thought being given to the effect upon the lives of the Indigenous peoples whose lands and waters were being claimed.

Did Cook 'discover' Australia?

While it is often said that Captain Cook discovered Australia, it is meant in a very limited sense. The Aboriginal people who travelled to Australia around [60,000 years ago, or earlier](#), were the first discoverers. Peoples in what are now known as Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Indonesia also long knew of the existence of Australia, although not its full size.

Even if we confine the idea of 'discovery' to 'discovery by Europeans' (which is the type of discovery mentioned in Cook's Secret Instructions), a number of [Europeans visited](#) the Australian continent well before Cook. The Dutch explorer [Willem Janszoon](#) landed on the Cape York Peninsula in 1606.

Another Dutch explorer, Dirk Hartog visited an island off the coast of Western Australia in 1616, leaving a [pewter plate](#) nailed to a post there to record his visit. Dutch explorers mapped much of the north, west and southern parts of what they called 'New Holland', but did not know how large the entire continent was. Abel Tasman sailed to Tasmania, which he named Van Diemen's Land, in 1642, and then on to New Zealand.

Cook was not even the first British person to visit Australia. [William Dampier](#) landed in the north-west of Australia, near Broome, in 1688 and returned in 1699. Cook's contribution was to show there was no separate 'great southern land' between New Zealand and Tahiti, and to map and explore the east coast of Australia in 1770. When he arrived, Cook [carried with him](#) earlier Dutch maps of the north, west and south coasts of Australia. By mapping the east coast, he completed the last main part of the puzzle, so that Europeans could see a map of the whole continent (except Tasmania, which [Matthew Flinders](#) mapped in 1798).

Cook also had the aid of some local knowledge in making his 'discoveries'. He was accompanied on his journey from Tahiti by Tupaia, a Polynesian man, who was an extraordinary navigator. He helped Cook chart and navigate the islands of the South Pacific. Tupaia also translated for Cook in New Zealand where he played an important diplomatic role. Tupaia was with Cook when he landed at Botany Bay (known as Kamay) and was challenged by two Gweagal men. Sadly, Tupaia was unable to communicate with the Gweagal people, resulting in mistrust and hostility.



What was the effect of Cook claiming possession of Australia for the British?

Endeavour replica in Cooktown harbour where the original was breached for 7 weeks after having been damaged on the Great Barrier Reef
Source: Wiki Commons

On 22 August 1770, Cook hoisted a British flag on Possession Island (in the Torres Strait off the coast of Queensland). The Island was originally named [Bedhan Lag](#) (or Bedhanug) by its Indigenous owners, the Kaurareg people. They too were skilled sea-farers who had lived there for thousands of years, hunting dugongs, fishing and trading. There, Cook claimed to [take possession](#) of the whole east coast of Australia, calling it 'New South Wales'. This was celebrated by firing weapons.

What did this mean? Could you really take control and possession of a vast area of land by raising a flag, uttering some words, and firing some guns? No. It was simply an indication that the British made a claim to the land. It was a claim that was [directed at other European powers](#). It told those powers to keep out and that any attempt by another country to claim the land may provoke a British naval or military response.

Did Cook seek 'the consent of the Natives' before claiming possession, as required in his instructions? No. [Cook's diaries](#) indicate that he observed Torres Strait Islanders on the shore,

noting their smoke signals, which one Torres Strait Elder has described as 'the blackfella internet.' Cook recorded seeing armed men on Possession Island, but wrote in his [diary](#) 'they all made off and left us in peaceable possession of as much of the Island as served our purpose'. He did not negotiate with them, let alone obtain their consent. His land claim was so large that no Indigenous group could have given him consent, and no free and informed consent could have, or would have, been given.

Was the claim legally effective? No. To be effective, the British had to settle and control the area. They did not. Cook packed up and sailed away. But the claim was effective in deterring other European countries from colonising Australia, which was its primary aim. It was later given effect by the colonisation and exercise of legal control over Australia by the British, but this was much later than 1770, or indeed, 1788.



Topic 4.2: Lesson/ Activities Two

Captain Cook and his Secret Instructions



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Time/Lesson	Learning Goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">1 hour	To understand the effect of Cook claiming possession of Australia for the British.
Rationale	Success Criteria
Students' knowledge of the purpose of colonial exploration lays the foundation for understanding how this impacted upon the Indigenous peoples of the lands they colonised.	Students understand the different perspectives of the British and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about Cook's visit to Australia and his claim of possession for the British. Students understand the reasons for the claim, the instructions that had been given to Cook, and the impact of the claim, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Teaching Reference Document	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">TRD 6: Captain (Lieutenant) Cook's instructions	
Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cook's Secret InstructionsWorld MapTimeline of exploration	
Tuning In	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cook's Secret Instructions (see the TRD).Place a copy of the secret instructions and the map in an envelope – pretend the envelope has been delivered to the classroom and teacher as being the recipient "Captain Cook".Set the scene by explaining to students that Captain Cook was commissioned by the Royal Society to undertake a voyage of exploration and scientific discovery. Cook was to sail to Tahiti to use special telescopes to observe the planet Venus crossing the sun, and make astronomical observations that would help measure the size of the solar system.Explain to students that prior to leaving Cook received a set of secret instructions from the British Government. He was only to open these once he was out to sea.Open the letter and read it to the class.Show the map to the students and the timeline of dates of Cook's voyage.Original instructions can be viewed for discussion of primary source https://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/resources/transcripts/nsw1_doc_1768.pdf	
Teacher Instruction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">View BTN the history of HMB Endeavour's 1770 voyage https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=316F1A8c09k	

Group Independent Learning

- Students use a map of the world and the dates to create a “map” timeline of Captain Cook’s explorations.
- Options for map
 - Provide a blank world map to annotate using an Atlas or the Internet to find locations.
 - Provide a blackline master map with some information already annotated.
 - Provide dates and details as a cut and paste.
- (The options provided can be matched to the ability of the class or individuals within the group - all options may be utilised in the one lesson to provide differentiation).

Wrapping It Up

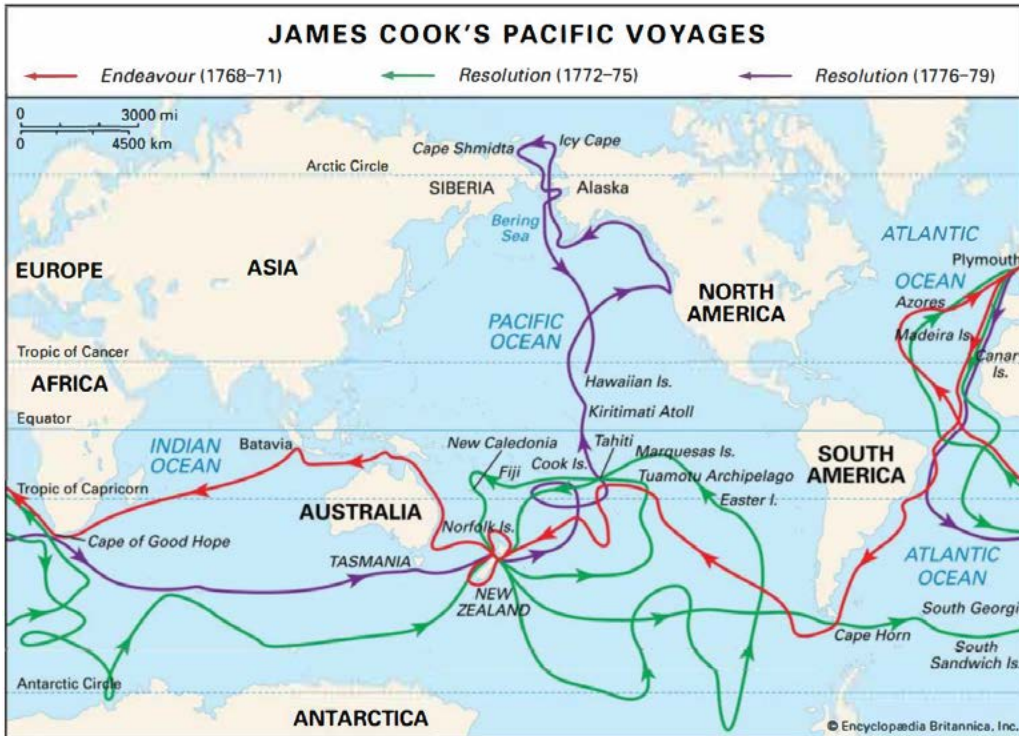
- Discuss the names of the various locations (particularly those inhabited by Indigenous People) and locate them on a map (4.2. Lesson 2. Resource 3).
- What were the aims of British exploration (eg scientific discovery, trade, resources)? Why were they concerned about other colonising nations? What would life have been like if Australia had instead been colonised by the French or Dutch?
- View BTN Indigenous Perspectives of Cook’s Visit - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lfqSS8kpLA>
Students discuss the appropriateness of Captain Cook claiming possession of the east coast of Australia, which he called New South Wales, for the British. Imagine the experience of first contact with the British and the effect this had on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Prompt students to imagine that they live on an island that has been in their family for thousands of years and then someone comes and claims it for their own. Consider the “fairness” of this situation and generate discussion about whether it is “right and just” for this to occur.

Support

Support with dates (potentially provide a list or a cut and paste of facts if needed). Alternatively limit some of the dates to those most significant.

Extension

Add additional voyages of Captain James Cook including annotations of discoveries. For example: Source - <https://www.britannica.com/biography/James-Cook>



2. Extension: To further develop the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in relation to first contact see:

Cook's Voyages Game, by the National Maritime Museum, which adds a perspective 'from the shore' of a Pakana woman in Tasmania: <https://www.sea.museum/explore/apps-and-games/cooks-voyagesgame>

'Eight days in Kamay' by the State Library of New South Wales: <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/eight-days-in-kamay/introduction/1>

3. Extension: Kamay spears

Cook and his crew took a number of spears from the Gweagal people at Kamay when they visited in 1770. Four of these spears have been held for a long time by Trinity College at the University of Cambridge, and were kept in the University's Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. In March 2023 Trinity College announced that the spears were to be returned to Australia: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-64809725>. Learn more about the spears, how they were made and their significance to the Gweagal people and all Australians: <https://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/endeavour-voyage/kamay-botany-bay/kamay-spears>.

Assessment Strategies

Formative assessment through observation. HASS Skill – Time line (4.2 Lesson 2. Teacher Resource 1).



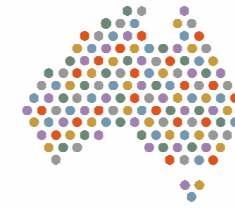


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Secret Instructions

“[T]here is reason to imagine that a Continent or Land of great extent, may be found to the Southward...You are to proceed to the Southward in order to make discovery of the Continent...If you discover the Continent abovementioned... You [a]re...carefully to observe the Nature of the Soil, and the Products thereof; the Beasts and Fowls that inhabit or frequent it, the Fishes that are to be found in the Rivers or upon the Coast and in what Plenty and in Case you find any Mines, Minerals, or valuable Stones you are to bring home Specimens of each, as also such Specimens of the Seeds of the Trees, Fruits and Grains as you may be able to collect... You are likewise to observe the Genius, Temper, Disposition and Number of the Natives, if there be any and endeavour by all proper means to cultivate a Friendship and Alliance with them... You are also with the Consent of the Natives to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country in the Name of the King of Great Britain: Or: if you find the Country uninhabited take Possession for his Majesty”.





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Map of Terra Australis Incognita

Source: Wiki Commons



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1768–1771: First voyage – Endeavour

26 May 1768: Cook took command of HMB Endeavour

25 August 1768: The Endeavour sailed from Plymouth

14 January 1769: The Endeavour anchored in the Bay of Good Success, Tierra del Fuego, where provisions were taken on board and artist Alexander Buchan made a series of drawings.

13 April 1769: The Endeavour anchored in Matavai Bay, Tahiti, where good relations were established with Tuteha, the chief of the area.

3 June 1769: Three parties observed the Transit of Venus but the results proved imprecise.

13 July 1769: The Endeavour left Tahiti.

9 October 1769: The first landing at Turanganui-a-kiwa, which Cook later called Poverty Bay. Shots were fired, resulting in the death of Maori leader Te Maro.

10 October 1769: First meeting between British and Maori. Two further violent incidents take place during which Te Rakau and several other men were killed by British musket fire.

23 October 1769: The Endeavour anchored at Uawa, which Cook called Tolaga Bay. During the stay the artists made drawings of artefacts and places, including the arched rock.

9 November 1769: Cook and Charles Green observed the Transit of Mercury at 'Mercury Bay'.

16 January 1770: The Endeavour anchored at Ship Cove, Queen Charlotte Sound.

10 March 1770: The Endeavour passed the southern tip of the South Island, disproving the theory, common in Europe, that New Zealand was part of the Great Southern Continent.

19 April 1770: The east coast of Australia was sighted. The Endeavour sailed north in search of an anchorage at which supplies could be taken on.

29 April 1770: The first landing was made at Botany Bay (Kamay). A confrontation took place with two Aboriginal men who opposed the British landing and shots were fired, injuring one man in the leg.

5 May 1770: The Endeavour sailed north, passing an inlet Cook called Port Jackson, which later became the site of the first British prison colony in Australia and which grew into the modern city of Sydney.

11 June 1770: The Endeavour ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef off modern-day Queensland. The ship was holed below the waterline and nearly sank.

18 June 1770: A landing was made at Waalumbaal Birri, which the British called Endeavour River, and the ship hauled ashore for repairs.

10 July 1770: The first meeting between the British and the Guugu Yimithirr people who lived in the Endeavour River area. During the stay, Sydney Parkinson compiled a vocabulary of the Guugu Yimithirr language, including the word 'Kangaroo' (Gangurru).

22 August 1770: Cook claimed the east coast of Australia, calling it New South Wales, at an island he called Possession Island (Bedhan Lag).

11 October 1770: The Endeavour anchored at Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) for further repairs and provisioning.

14 March 1771: The Endeavour anchored at the Cape of Good Hope to take on supplies before sailing north towards Britain.

16 July 1771: The Endeavour anchored in the Thames, in London.

Source: British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/the-voyages-of-captain-james-cook/timeline#> (all additional dates can be found here)





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HASS Skill - Timeline

	A	B	C	D	E
Timeline	Purposeful sequencing of information about events, the lives of individuals and selected phenomena in chronological order using timelines	Effective sequencing of information about events, the lives of individuals and selected phenomena in chronological order using timelines	Sequencing of information about events, the lives of individuals and selected phenomena in chronological order using timelines	Partial sequencing of information about events, the lives of individuals and selected phenomena in chronological order using timelines	Fragmented sequencing of information about events, the lives of individuals and selected phenomena in chronological order using timelines

