

Australia



The Rainbow Serpent - A story from Australia

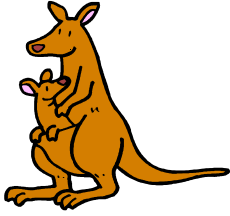
The Beginning of Life

Once, the sleeping earth was flat, dark and cold. No creature stirred. There were no hills and valleys, no trees or rivers.

In the centre of Australia, far beneath the surface of the earth, the Rainbow Serpent, Mother of Life, grew restless in her sleep. It was time for her to give birth to the children in her belly - all the animal tribes.

Slowly, she uncurled from her cramped sleeping place and began to burrow her way to the surface. But something stopped her. A great rock was in her way. For many, many moons the Mother of Life pushed and pushed the boulder up. Inch by inch it moved until one day, it burst on to the surface. The Rainbow Serpent pushed it aside and looked around at the desolate landscape. She needed to rest from her labour. Before she set off on her wanderings, she turned to look at the rock which had gained its freedom like a baby, and she said: 'You are my first-born, you will be called Uluru.'

Her travels took her far and wide across the land. When she grew tired, she curled herself into a circle to sleep and regain her strength. When she awoke, she looked back and saw the deep winding tracks where she had travelled. Where she had slept, great hollows had been left, looking out of place on the flat plains.



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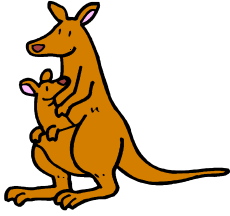


Now she felt the staggering pain of her babies crying to be free. It was time to return to Uluru. When she got back to the place of her first-born, she made herself ready. She called to the frog tribes inside her to come out. They had been sleeping for many, many seasons and moved slowly, heavy with water they had stored in their stomachs for the long hibernation before their birth. They shook their lazy heads. They did not want to give up their precious water but the wise mother tickled their stomachs. When they laughed, the water flowed in torrents from their mouths to fill the tracks of the Rainbow Serpent's wanderings, to make lakes and rivers, oceans and streams.

Suddenly the scene was still. A far rumbling could be heard, and like a burst of laughter, grass began to grow, trees sprang up and flowers bloomed. Life had begun on earth. All the animal tribes, the kangaroo, the emu, the platypus and kookaburra flowed from the rainbow serpent to join their frog brothers. They flew and hopped, scurried and slithered all over the land and sky. They were happy on earth.

Now each animal stayed with his brothers and sisters, and hunted and played in harmony. The galah tribe preferred to live in the treetops and the snake tribe hunted between the rocks and trees. Each tribe knew that this was the law of the Rainbow Serpent.

The wise old woman looked at her happy children and said: 'There is food for all. Each tribe will be a totem. Let no one eat of his own totem for there is food for all. Those who keep this law, I will reward with human life. You and your children's children shall roam this land in happiness, hunting and playing



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forever. Those who disobey, I will punish and turn to stone, to sit in gloom until the end of time.'

And so it was. Those who broke the Rainbow Serpent's laws she turned to mountains, hills and stones. They were left to sit while their brothers and sisters played and hunted at their feet. To those who kept the laws, she gave a human form and each human tribe kept as their totem the animal they had once been.

The tribes know themselves by their totems and a kangaroo man does not eat his brother, the kangaroo. In this way the Mother of Life, the Rainbow Serpent, makes sure that there is always food for all her children.