Australian
Design
Centre

Education Kit

LOLA·GREENO·CULTURAL·JEWELS

Australian Design Centre

INTRODUCTION

The Lola Greeno: Cultural Jewels education kit has been developed for primary students and their teachers. It aims to convey the importance of Aboriginal cultural practices; in this case, the craft of shell stringing to make necklaces. this practice relies on a deep understanding and connection with the local environment, and the makers hold intricate knowledge of the shells and their habitat. By the passing down of knowledge and skills from generation to generation the culture and connections are maintained.

Tasmanian Aboriginals made and traded cultural objects such as shell necklaces, baskets, spears and water carriers with European visitors and then British colonisers. Contact with seafarers brought access to metal needles, thread and containers all of which facilitated the women's shell work. Those who were dispossessed of their land and sent to live in exile on Flinders and other islands across the Bass Strait continued to make cultural material even in times of great hardship.

Lola Greeno comes from a long line of shell stringers within a tightly knit network of Aboriginal families who have maintained the shell necklace tradition in Tasmanian waters since time immemorial. It is only in recent years that the significance of this cultural practice has begun to be understood beyond the Aboriginal community.

Dr Julie Gough *Lola Greeno*: Cultural Jewels

Information in this education kit has been drawn from the monograph Lola Greeno; Cultural Jewels, the Australian Museum website (www.ausmus.com.au) and podcasts of Lola sharing her wonderful stories.

You can download Lola's stories and play them to your students at http://www.object.com.au/exhibitions-events/entry/lola_greeno_cultural_jewels/ 10

Education Kit: Developed by Annette Mauer
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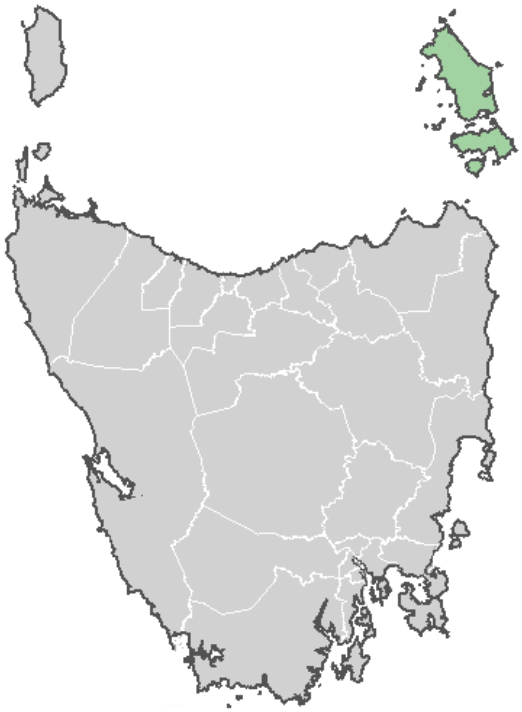
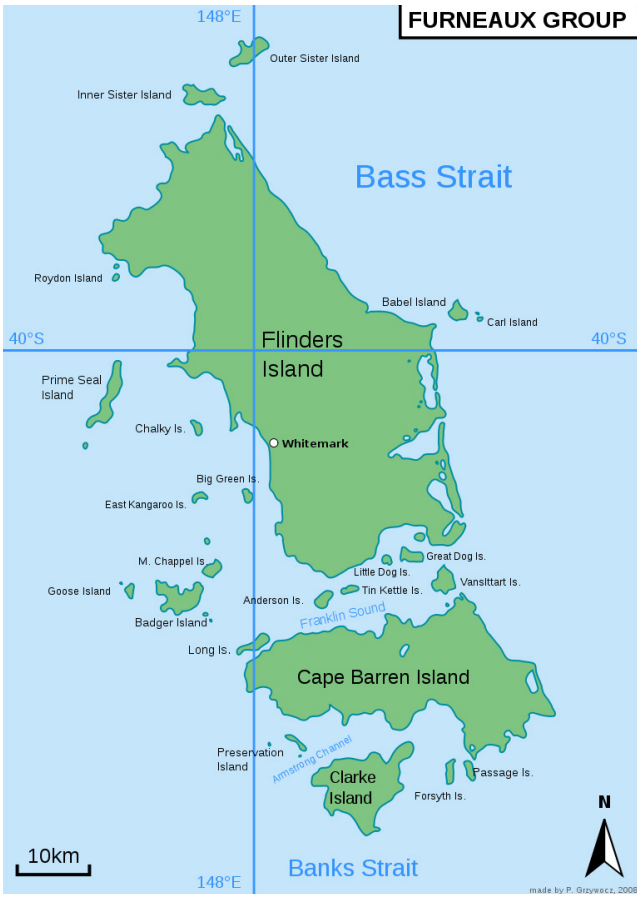
Monograph: Lola Greeno, Dr Julie Gough, edited by Sandra Brown.
Photography: John Leeming, Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery, Sandra Brown, except where indicated.

LOLA'S EARLY LIFE

Lola Greeno was born on Cape Barren Island and lived in a place called Prickly Bottom. Lola thinks the name came from the very prickly bushes that grew in the area. Lola's house was very close to a beautiful beach and it was here that her brothers would fish and her mother would collect mairineer shells from the seaweed and dry* shells from the beach. Lola grew up learning how to collect shells and recognising when the tides would be right for collecting shells.
When Lola became ill her family moved to the larger and more populated Flinders Island. It was here that she met and married her husband Rex Greeno. Lola and Rex and their children eventually settled in Launceston. She still visits Cape Barren and Flinders Island regularly. This ensures she maintains a connection to her birth place and her Aboriginal heritage.

ACTIVITY SHEET





Questions and Activities

- Locate and name Cape Barren, Flinders, Babel and Big Dog Islands on the map.
- Find Prickly Bottom on the map of Cape Barren Island and Yellow Beach on Flinders Island.
- Locate Hobart and Launceston.
- Research some of the history of the Aboriginal people who once lived on these islands.
- Write a travel brochure to Cape Barren and Flinders Islands. How would people get there and what would they see and do on the islands? Design your brochure using the colours of the landscape and plant life of the islands.

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF GROWING AND CATCHING FOOD

yolla necklace, 2012
mutton bird feathers, cane

"We had to be self sufficient to survive, which meant growing our own vegetables, making clothes and handing down used clothes. Dad snared kangaroo for meat and we ate salted mutton- birds in brine for most of the year until the next season. Mum cooked all our food, dampers, kangaroo or mutton bird stews, vegetables and dumplings. I cannot remember drinking cordial or eating lollies and we had never heard of take- away foods. I can just remember following Dad to the vegetable garden along a side track overlooking the beach. Dad taught the boys how to set snares, to catch kangaroos and wallabies. On the path down to the vegetable patch, Dad pegged out the kangaroo skins on the big gum trees to dry."

Mutton Bird season runs from late March to late April each year and whole families would move to Babel Island for a working holiday. This was a chance to be with other families, working together to catch and prepare enough Mutton birds for the year. Each person, children included had a special job to carry out.

After the birds were caught they went through a number of processes including plucking and cleaning. The birds were put in very hot water and scrubbed with a piece of hessian. Once the bird's insides had been removed they were rubbed with coarse salt and packed in a barrel. When the barrel was full of birds it was topped up with water, making a salty brine. This preserved the birds for eating later.

Questions and Activities

- Write a short history of your life including where you were born and something special you have done with family or friends.
- Find a picture of a mutton Bird.
- Many of the animals we eat go through a process before we eat them. Trace a process that an animal such as a sheep, cow or fish goes through.
- Many people treat food such as fruit, vegetables or meat to eat at other times of the year. Name some of these foods.
- Debate some of the issues of the way we get our food in the modern world. This could include obtaining food from great distances, the way we keep live animals, the problems with cows and methane gas.

COLLECTING SHELLS

Gathering shells was a fun activity because the beach was an extension of our backyard and playground, and we were attracted to their colour and shape. As kids it was just a natural activity as we ran along with Mum though, as I came to learn, it was also an introduction to an important part of our cultural heritage.

MAKING SHELL NECKLACES

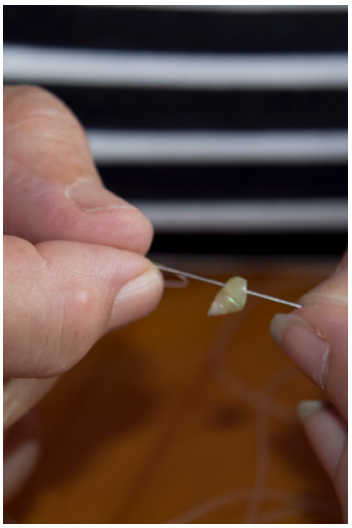
There are four stages that you must go through to make a shell necklace –

1. collecting

2. cleaning and stripping,

3. sorting and preparing for stringing and

4. threading the shells using patterns and combinations of different shells.



Making shell necklaces recquires an in-depth knowledge of the places to collect, the seasons and correct tides for collecting live shells. Some shells live under the sand, some in the area between the land and sea, some live on rocks while others live on different sea plants.

The most valued shell, the maireeners are traditionally harvested live, with some effort, by removing them carefully from the kelp that they grow on, at special places during the low seasonal tides. They are sometimes collected dry (dead) after being washed up on beaches and in rock pools.

To clean the maireeners, the shells are left outside for up to 8 weeks, during which time flies and ants remove the animal from inside the shell. Lola's mother would sometimes put a little raw meat out with the live mairineer shells to get the flies to blow the shells and help clean out the snail? mollusc or marine animal.

The shells are then moved about in a special chemical solution which is secretly guarded by the shell stringers. This process reveals their pearly sheen sub –surface. Prior to European contact there are reports of burying the shells in seaweed, the use of urine, wood ash, the use of ochre and fat and the smoking of the shells being used to achieve this.

Once rinsed in water and dried the shells are sorted. They are then pierced using a fine needle and a hammer on a block of soft pine so the shell is not resistant against the wood. In former times they used the sharpened wallaby eye tooth and would tap it with a rock.

They are strung onto rot proof and fray resistant thread. Depending on the size of the necklace, it can take Lola between 2 and 5 days to create each work. Some necklaces such as the long maireener and the graduated abalone necklaces can take two or more years to collect enough of the right shells to string.

So many hours of collecting. And you may be in the water, collecting these maireeners one at a time off the seaweed for three hours and you may only end up with just half a cup of shells.

And then you take them home and put them out and rot them out and depending on what the weather conditions are like they can take a month to two months probably to get them to rot enough for you. Then you would have a day of piercing them. Then it might take you another day to size all of them, to grade them all. And so that's before you start.

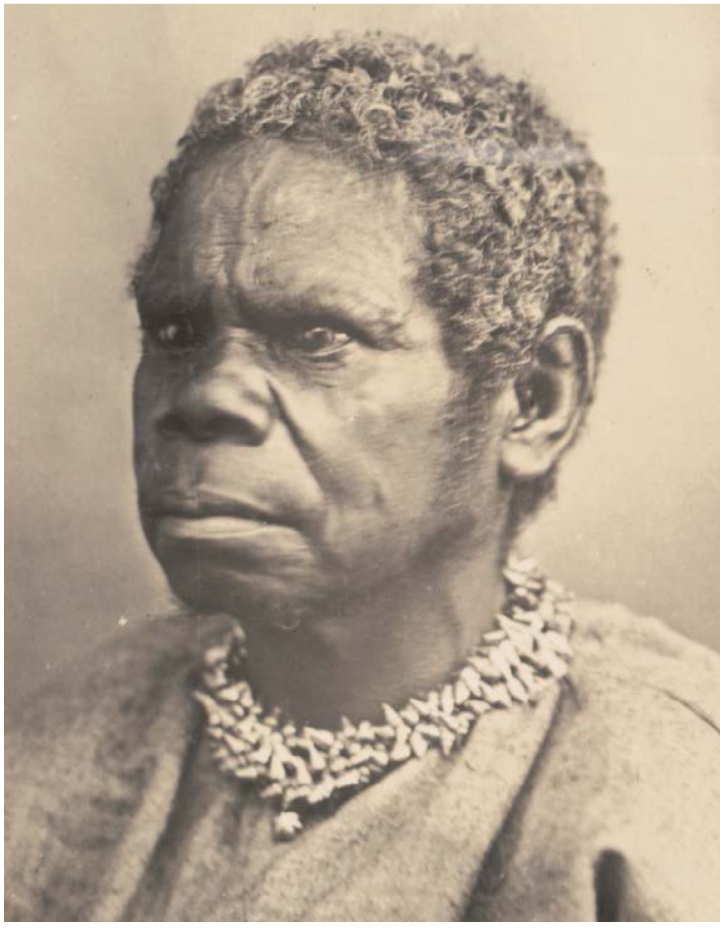
Questions and Activities

- Draw a diagram or cartoon illustrating the process of making shell necklaces.
- Research the life cycle of shells.

A LONG TRADITION

Prior to contact with European seafarers necklace makers threaded the shells on to either twined plants, bark or kangaroo sinew (from the muscle, tendon, ligament) They punctured the shell using the sharpened eye tooth of a wallaby jawbone.

Seafarers brought access to cotton thread, metal needles and containers which allowed a greater variety of shells to be used in increasingly smaller sizes. This encouraged necklace makers to experiment with the patterns and create more personal works, as well as making longer necklaces.



Truganini (c. 1812 – 8 May 1876) was a woman considered to be the last full blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian (mPalawa). She is shown here wearing necklace/s of maireener shells.

Photographer: Charles Alfred Wooley, c. 1866
National Library of Australia, an23795214.

Questions and Activities

- Research other traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and craft.
- Think about what type of materials are used in these craft and art forms. Where are they from and what are their relationship to the natural world?

THE PRECIOUS MARINEER SHELLS

Maireener shells are the shells traditionally used in shell necklace making. These are now in short supply, and can only be collected at certain times of the year.

Lola made the beautiful crown made from king maireener shells in honour of Lucy Beeton, the daughter of John Beeton, a Londoner and Emmerenna, a Tasmanian Aborigine. Lucy was known as 'Queen of the Isles' because she was a leader in her community. She was a teacher and established a school, she was a trader and business woman and was active in islanders' efforts from the 1850s to gain land, especially mutton-bird rookeries, as compensation for Aboriginal dispossession in Tasmania.

She used her relationship with influential clergy to advance the interests of indigenous Tasmanians, and expressed the view that Europeans had 'dispossessed ''her people" of their land, and banished them to die on Flinders Island'.

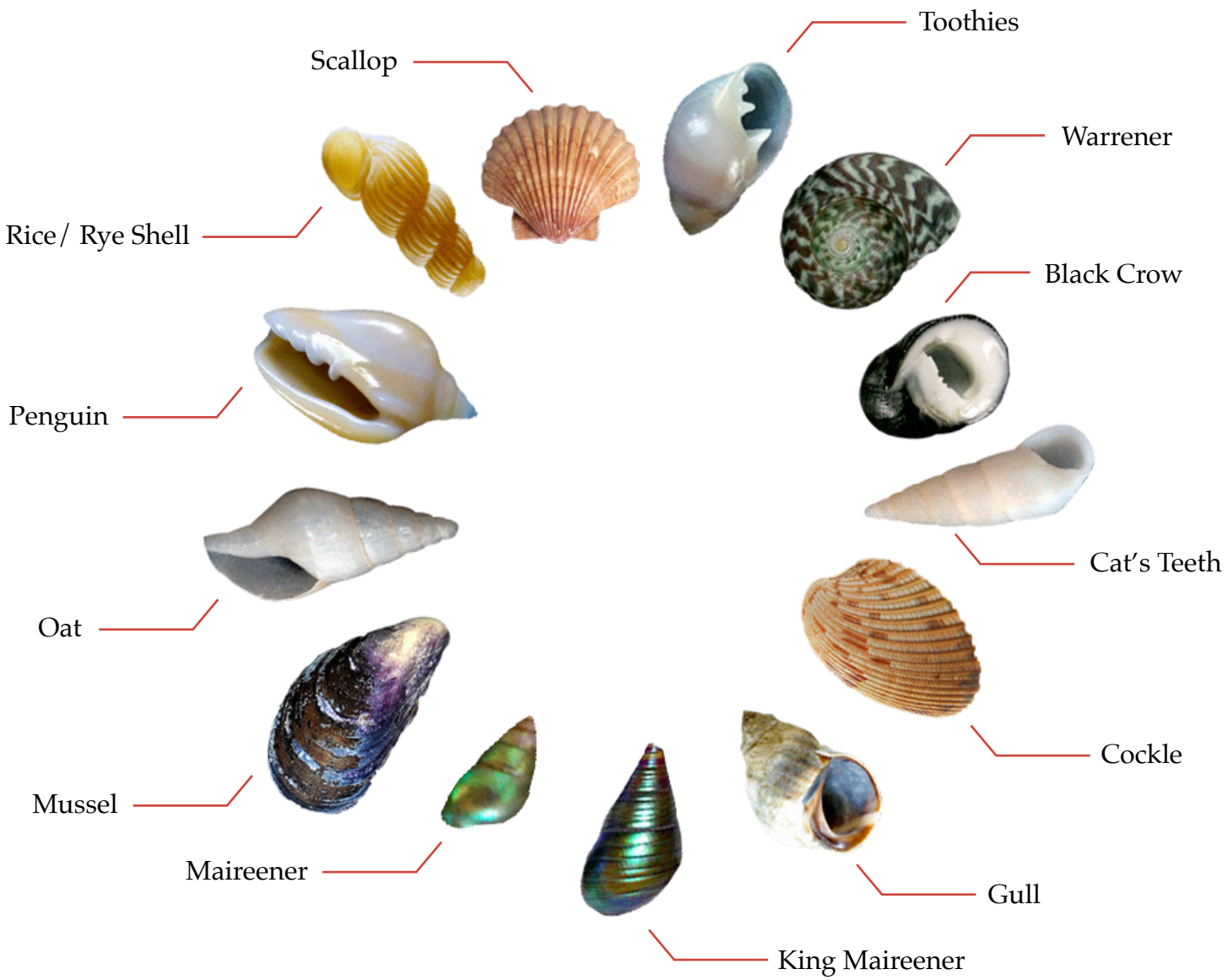
Lola and other shell stringers are always aware of their local environment and the possibility of certain shells, especially the mairineers, may disappear altogether. Sometimes they keep locations of particular shells, whose numbers are diminishing a secret , in order to give them a chance to rebreed and replenish the stock.

I make our teaching/learning sessions enjoyable but at the same time understanding we must take care of the environment to only collect shells that we will use.

teunne crown, 2013
king maireener shells, wire

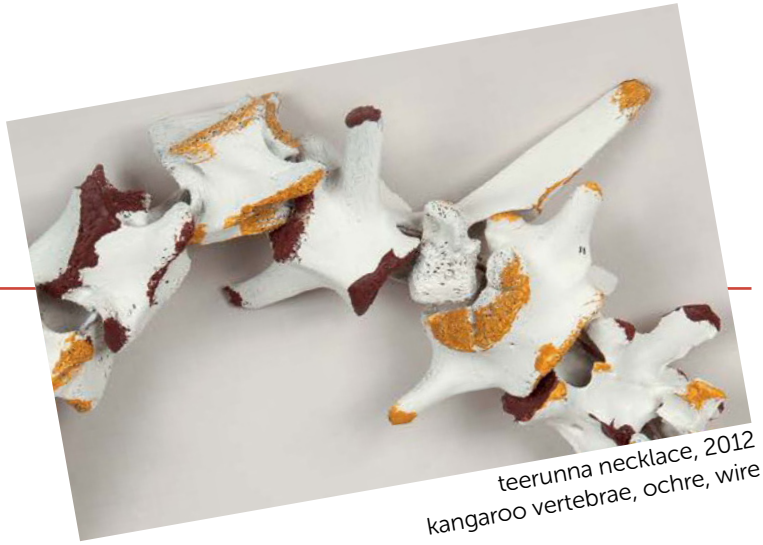
Questions and Activities

- What do crowns symbolise? What are they usually made from and who wears them?
- What make Lola's crown so special and why is it so suitable for Lucy Beeton?
- Why are Lola and other shell stringers so careful about respecting their environment?



- Which shells are the traditional shells used in shell necklace making?
- Create your own necklace design. Use mathematical formulas or musical rhythms to create a pattern.
- Create a graphic design using the form of the shells – repeat pattern for fabric or a design for a greeting card.

OTHER MATERIALS THAT LOLA USES TO MAKE BEAUTIFUL OBJECTS



teerunna necklace, 2012
kangaroo vertebrae, ochre, wire

If we can't collect maireeners any more I would look to other cultural material relating to food,or what we wear and think how I might use that.

Most of the objects that Lola makes using other materials such as echidna quill necklaces or possum skin arm bands could be worn for ceremonies or as sculptural pieces, but these are not traditional items.

She uses kangaroo vertebrae, possum skin, Mutton bird feathers, Casurina nuts and ochres, echidna quills and kelp.

These materials relate to the food, clothing, medicines and everyday utensils used by Aboriginal people.

lulada and luna necklaces, 2012
casurina nuts, ochre, wire (left)

menna necklace, 2013
echidna quills, wire (right)

Questions and Activities

- Find out about possum skin cloaks. How were they made and what were they used for?
- What was kelp originally used for?
- Gather some native nuts or seeds from your local environment that have fallen on the ground and make a ceremonial piece of jewellery.
- Vicky West is a Tasmanian artist that makes works from bull kelp collected from the waters of Tasmania. Watch this short video. She also mentions Flinders Island and shell necklace making.
http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/channel/clip/391/

A LONG TRADITION

Making shell necklaces is not only about making a beautiful object but it connects the makers with the land, sea, and tides, and passes skills and knowledge down from elders to younger people – generation to generation.

"I considered it was important for my mum and I to work together to carry on this significant cultural women's practice in Tasmania. I have now taught my daughter and my granddaughters to collect [and learn] the common names of the shells known to our grandmother's generation. I am very proud to have maintained a legacy of our earlier women".

Lola learnt how to collect and look after shells and many of the shell stringing techniques from her mother. Her mother sold many of her shell necklaces to a visiting Anglican minister and this helped support her family. Lola's mother mentioned that her own grandmother had left jars of shells in the old house at Prickly Bottom. So shell collecting and stringing was part of a long tradition. Lola and her mother began working on necklaces together. Loa's mother had her own way of putting shells together to make a pattern and she particularly liked black crow and white penguin shells arranged in a particular way.

"I have a photo of Mum cleaning marineer shells at my house and a photo of her making a shell necklace at the table with badtjala artist Fiona Foley, my sister Audrey and myself. We each threaded a section and joined them together into one necklace and gave it to Fiona as a gift for her mother."*

Valerie Sainty (Lola's Mother),
powamena necklace, 1991
cat's teeth shells, cotton thread

Questions and Activities

- Have you learnt a skill or craft from someone in your family? Describe what you learnt.
- Why is it important for elders to pass down traditions and skills to younger generations? Create a campaign to raise awareness about this issue.
- What type of skills have we already lost in our contemporary world? What would you like to see renewed?
- What are some of the ways we can pass down knowledge and skills to others?

THE CAPE BARREN GOOSE

One of Lola's ambitions is to ensure that her granddaughters also learn about shell collecting while respecting the environment and understanding 'while they have the right to continue the tradition of shell necklace making from their grandmothers'

Lola's granddaughters can then share some of that knowledge to a broader audience while protecting certain aspects that will be shared only between Indigenous women of Tasmania.

Charlyse and Sheryden (Lola's Granddaughters), Cape Barren Goose bracelets, 2014 assorted shells, cotton thread, silver fittings

This is a story shell bracelet entitled the Cape Barren Goose bracelet. The goose is depicted by using shells to represent the colours in the feathers.

Lola's granddaughters have made bracelets using these shells.

The grey gull shells – the feathers on the body.

Black Crow shells – the feet

Oat shells – the legs

Penguin shells – the beak

Cockle shells – white under the wings

Cape Barren Goose, 2008. Photographer: JJ Harison. upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/74/Cape_Barren_Goose_edit1.jpg

Questions and Activities

- Find a bird with interesting coloured feathers, feet and beaks and create your own wearable item using these colours.
- Find a photo of the Cape Barren Goose and research some information about this bird. Is it like a European Goose?