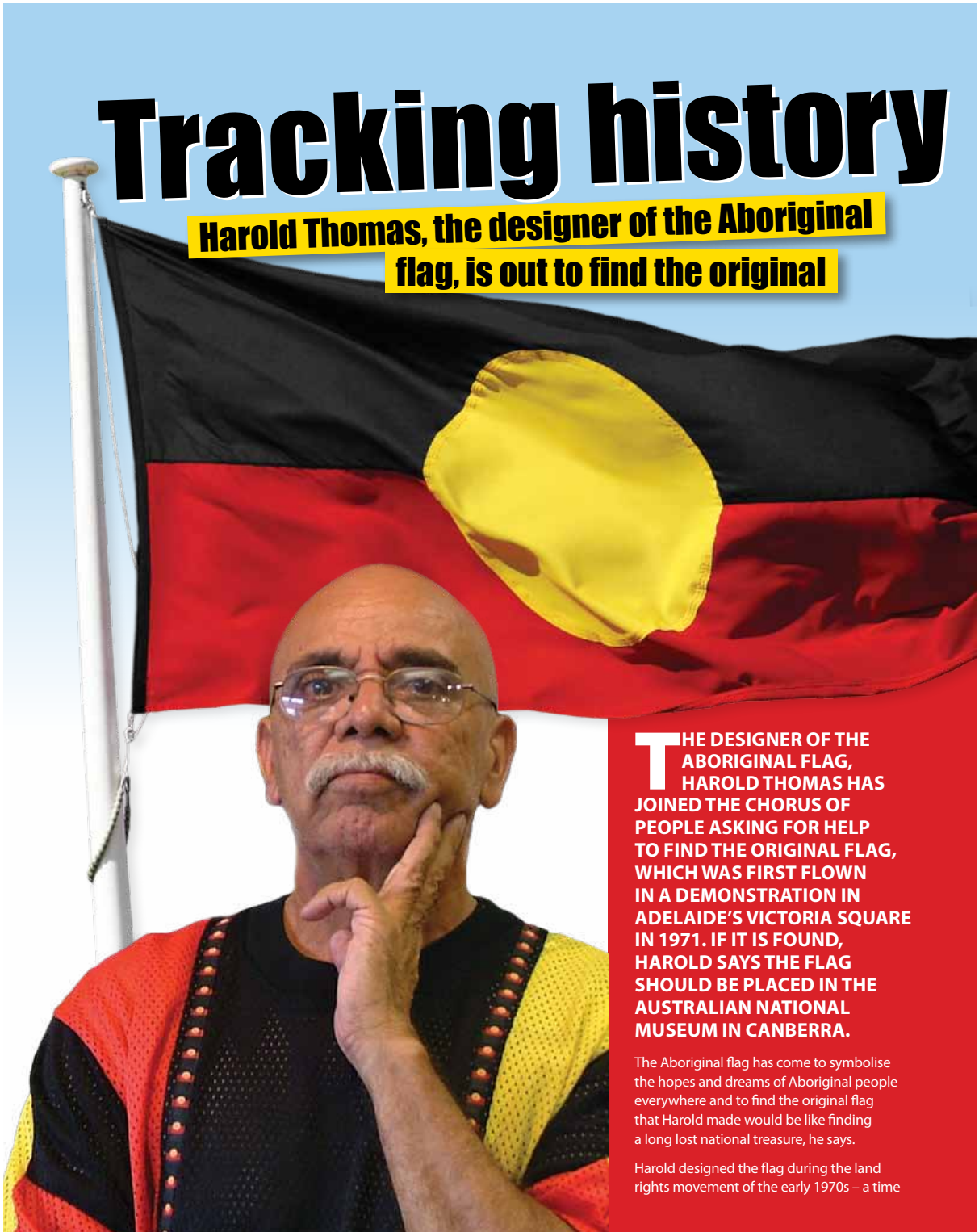


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Tracking history

Harold Thomas, the designer of the Aboriginal flag, is out to find the original



THE DESIGNER OF THE ABORIGINAL FLAG, HAROLD THOMAS HAS JOINED THE CHORUS OF PEOPLE ASKING FOR HELP TO FIND THE ORIGINAL FLAG, WHICH WAS FIRST FLOWN IN A DEMONSTRATION IN ADELAIDE'S VICTORIA SQUARE IN 1971. IF IT IS FOUND, HAROLD SAYS THE FLAG SHOULD BE PLACED IN THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MUSEUM IN CANBERRA.

The Aboriginal flag has come to symbolise the hopes and dreams of Aboriginal people everywhere and to find the original flag that Harold made would be like finding a long lost national treasure, he says.

Harold designed the flag during the land rights movement of the early 1970s – a time



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which he says coincided with “our emergence as relevant people in this country”.

“The flag is central to that. I have grown with it. It has been a part of life for my family here – and young Aboriginal people have grown up with the flag as if it was always there. If you are old enough to remember when we didn’t have one – and the changes between that time and today – well, a lot of things have been spoken about our emergence as relevant people in this country, and the flag is central to that.”

Harold says he has no idea where the original flag is – except he has an intuition it may be somewhere in Redfern.

“It could be anywhere between Perth and Brisbane, to Darwin and Hobart. I am not really worried, but it would be great if someone brings it out of the cobwebs and we can go from there,” Harold says.

“You never know – it may turn up. Someone rang me up about it from NITV – and I said to them that I thought it may have ended up at Redfern. If it did turn up there it would be a great story wouldn’t it? I mean we created our modern politics from Redfern.”

Harold says if the original flag does turn up it should be put in the National Museum.

“It has become an icon, a relic of political significance for Aboriginal people. So maybe it should go in the section of the National Museum regarding Aboriginal people, yes, maybe that is the place for it to go, so it gets protected for all time and it will create interest for the future. The flag is relevant for the modern political history of our Aboriginal people and for the general information of any person in this country.”

“The flag was made at the time when we needed one. It was and is about Aboriginal unity and identity and pride – these are basic things, which are incalculable. You can’t put a price on that and people are proud of that flag. It has some magnificent,

striking colours and those colours help give pride and confidence to thousands of Aboriginal people – in and out of jail.

The symbolic meanings of the flag colours (as stated by Harold) are: black – represents the Aboriginal people of Australia; red – represents the red earth, the red ochre and a spiritual relation to the land; and yellow – represents the sun, the giver of life and protector.

These days, Harold is keeping himself busy at home near Darwin, mainly as a painter of the landscape. His oils, acrylics and watercolours are highly collectable and represented in the Territory Colours Gallery in Darwin.

Harold has a deep love for the country and its wildlife and presents it in his unique and timeless way: “I am still being a creative artist and painting as I have always painted – from my art school days, which is back before 1965. I have created a lot of artworks and have given a lot of pleasure to myself and to those who like my art – but the flag stands on top of all that, doesn’t it?”

If he had the chance to live in the ‘60s again, Harold says he would do it all over again.

“That was a great time. Yes the ‘60s and early ‘70s were great because that was a changing time for everybody – in England and Australia and throughout the world. It was a time when young people actually changed the world,” he says.

“The flag was made at the time when we needed one – it was and is about Aboriginal unity and pride. These are basic things, which are incalculable. You can’t put a price on that.”

Now in his mid sixties, Harold is still active as a painter and family man. He is currently working on a major oil painting for all Australians, based on a historical event in the Northern Territory, which may be unveiled this year.

Harold was born in Alice Springs and is descended from the Luritja people of Central Australia. As a young boy, he was taken from his family and placed at St John’s Hostel. At the age of seven he was sent to South Australia’s St Francis House, an Anglican institution for Aboriginal boys. At the age of 11, he was fostered to a white family. At school he excelled in sports and started to take a strong interest in painting.

In 1965, Harold won a scholarship to study at the South Australian School of Art (the first Aboriginal person to do so). He graduated with Honours in 1969 and later also studied social anthropology at the University of Adelaide. During this time he became actively involved in the Aboriginal Civil Rights movement and designed the Aboriginal Flag in 1971.

In 1995, the flag was made an official ‘Flag of Australia’. Later Harold was involved in a high-profile case in the Federal Court and the High Court, to assert copyright over his design.

For more information about Harold visit:

www.territorycolours.com/harold_thomas.htm

Some other interesting facts about the Aboriginal Flag

- Activist **Gary Foley** took the flag to the East Coast where it was promoted and eventually recognised as the official flag of the Aboriginal people.
- The flag was first flown at **Victoria Square** in Adelaide on National Aborigines Day, **12 July 1971**.
- The flag was chosen as the official flag for the **Aboriginal Tent Embassy** and was first flown there in 1972.
- In 1995, the Australian Government proclaimed the flag as an official ‘**Flag of Australia**’ under section 5 of the Flags Act 1953.
- In 1997, **Harold Thomas** was recognised as the author of the artistic work under the Copyright Act 1968.



Did you know that Harold Thomas designed the Aboriginal flag in 1971?

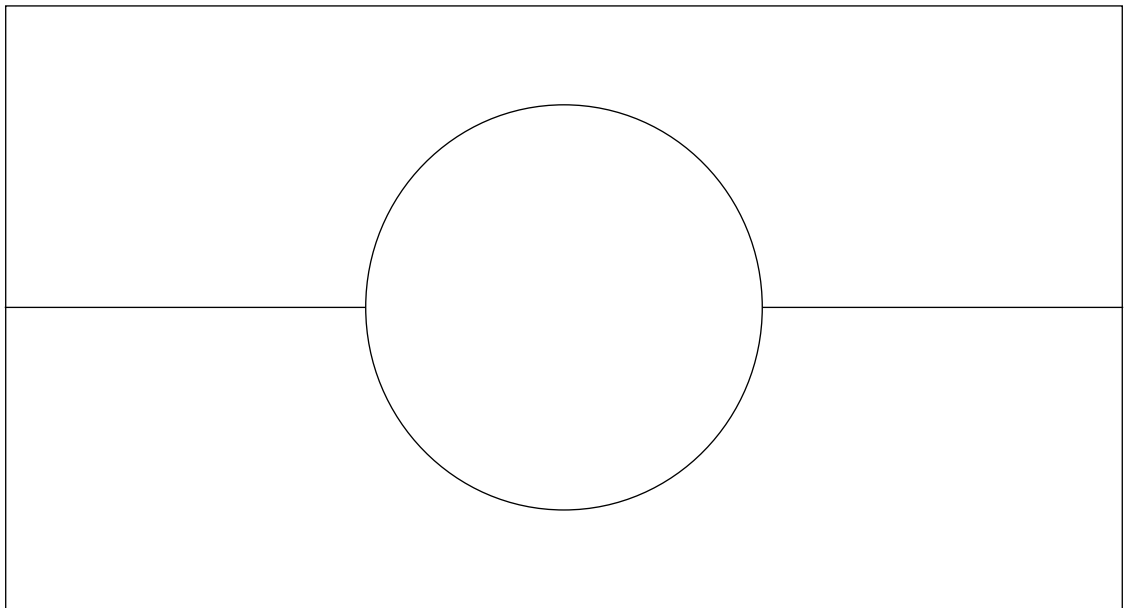
It is an important national symbol, representing Indigenous people in Australia.



ACTIVITY 1

COLOUR IN THE ABORIGINAL FLAG

1 Colour in the flag.



2 What do the colours represent?

Draw a line to join the colours with their meaning on the flag.

red

Aboriginal people

yellow

the land

black

the sun

ACTIVITY 2

MATCH THESE FLAGS

- 1** Here are three flags that we recognise in Australia.
Look at the flag on the left. Look at the words next to it.
Cut out the words that match each picture and glue them under the picture.



**Torres Strait
Islands**



Aboriginal



Australian

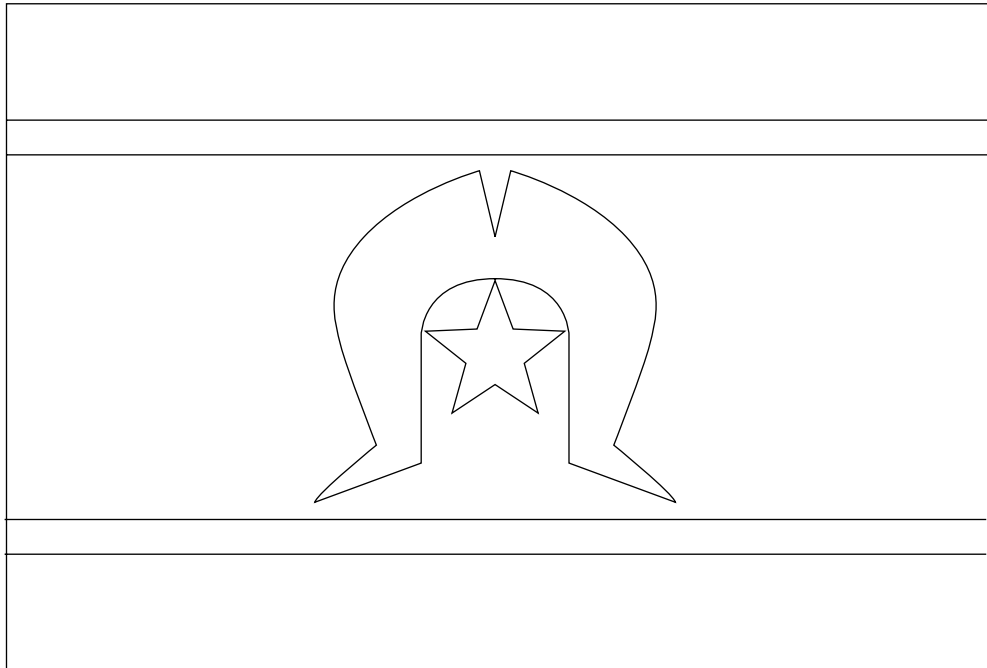
ACTIVITY 3

TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS FLAG

1 Below is the Torres Strait Islands flag. It was adopted in 1992.

It has three horizontal stripes with green at the top and bottom, and blue in between divided by thin black lines. A white *dharri* or *deri* (a type of headdress and a symbol for all Torres Strait Islander people) sits in the centre with a five-pointed star underneath.

Colour in the flag.



ACTIVITY 4

EXPLAIN WHAT THE FLAG MEANS TO YOU

1 Why is the Aboriginal flag or Torres Strait Islands flag important to you?
Explain what the flag means to you.
