Indigenous knowledge systems

In what ways are sense perception and memory crucial in constructing knowledge in indigenous knowledge systems? How do beliefs about the physical and metaphysical world influence the pursuit of knowledge in indigenous knowledge systems? How do indigenous people use the concept of respect to relate to their view of the world?

Indigenous knowledge systems explore local knowledge unique to a particular culture or society. The term usually refers to the knowledge constructed by a particular group of people such as the Namaqua people of Southern Africa, the Secoya people of Ecuador and Peru, the Ryukyuans of Japan and the Wopkaimin people of Papua New Guinea. An important feature of indigenous knowledge systems is that they are not static. They are dynamic as a result of both internal and external influences. The Maori knowledge system today, for example, is a mixture of traditional knowledge and knowledge inherited over time from exposure to European culture.

TOK students can explore this AOK from a general, broad point of view to raise awareness of the diversity of indigenous knowledge systems or they could study a particular indigenous knowledge system. When studying indigenous knowledge systems, it is important to examine the methods of communication, decision-making processes, thinking processes and the holistic view of knowledge.

**Knowledge framework**

- **Scope/applications**
  - attempts to explain the nature and existence of humanity for a particular group of human beings
  - incorporates a diverse range of systems including Inuits, Aymara Indians in Bolivia, Romani people and more

- **Concepts/language**
  - role of language in the knowledge system, for example storytelling
  - use of metaphor and analogies
  - maintaining traditions through written language
  - oral traditions are dying because they are not written down
  - conventions: role of elders, importance of group over individual
  - key concepts: nomad, concept of home, honour, ownership

- **Methodology**
  - oral tradition handing down through the generations—role of memory
  - ritual—shared emotion
  - folklore
  - music
  - artefacts
  - systems of reason
  - explaining observed natural phenomena as being part of a total worldview—role of sense perception

- **Historical development**
  - impact of colonization and globalization

- **Links to personal knowledge**
  - understanding the self—ancestry, place in the world, attitudes and behaviour towards others
  - elders personally contributing to the form of the knowledge system
  - collaboration: the enactment of ritual and tradition gives the possibility through a group effort of reinforcing the system of knowledge
  - ancestral knowledge linked to the personal
How reliable are “oral traditions” in preserving cultural heritage in indigenous knowledge systems?

To what extent does the fact that early literature on indigenous knowledge systems was written from a non-indigenous perspective affect its credibility?

How does sense perception play a fundamental role in the acquisition of knowledge in indigenous knowledge systems?

What elements of universal significance may we discern in indigenous knowledge systems?

To what extent can disinformation by education and governance threaten indigenous knowledge systems?

Why is there often such a strong connection between indigenous knowledge and cosmology?

What are the roles of folklore, rituals and songs in indigenous knowledge systems?

Examples of possible topics of study:

- The nature and role of artifacts
- Cycles and changes in the earth and sky
- Plants and animal behaviour
- The impact of technology on the relationship between indigenous peoples and their environment

Figure 18