

# How did Aboriginal Australians resist British colonisation?

Investigating four case studies at the National Museum of Australia

British occupation of Australia began in 1788.

The British authorities believed they were legally entitled to occupy the land and set up a permanent gaol for convicts. Later most immigrants believed that they were legitimate settlers in a new land.

To the Aboriginal people, however, this was their land. Where they had once lived under their own rule they were now forced to accept the laws of the newcomers. The newcomers had not been invited and they were generally not welcomed.

The lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were profoundly changed by the arrival of British colonists in 1788. Lives were lost and land taken as the colonisers attempted to impose new social, economic and religious orders. New animals, plants and diseases were introduced.

The question every Aboriginal person faced was: **how do we react to this situation?**

In this unit we look at the new *Resistance* exhibit in the Gallery of the First Australians at the National Museum of Australia, to explore some examples of the different ways Aboriginal people responded to that question.



kamalyaripa



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## IMAGINE THAT . . .

Imagine that you wake up to learn that a foreign and more powerful group has come into your area.

The intruders do not speak your language. They have a different religion and set of beliefs. They have different attitudes and values. They have different and superior weapons. Their way of living interferes with your use of the land and your spiritual beliefs. They quickly outnumber you, and start to take over your land. You fear that they will soon dominate you and change your way of life.

### What do you do?

List a variety of possible responses. Briefly outline the main advantages and disadvantages of each possible action. Discuss these in class, and decide which one you think you would choose in this situation.

Possible action	Advantages	Disadvantages

### How did you protect yourself and your people?

Some of you probably chose to take the most drastic course — *active resistance*.

Others might have thought that it was smarter to resist more subtly, *undermining* the invasion while maintaining your own traditional way of living as far as possible.

Some of you might have decided to *cooperate* (go along with) and even *collaborate* with (actually help) the occupying forces.

These and other responses to occupation are found many times throughout history. You might see if you can find examples of ways people have resisted invasion in different places, cultures and times, and discuss them in class. See if you can list three examples here.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_





This unit looks at four examples of Aboriginal people's reactions to the British occupation of Australia that started in 1788.

### The four case studies are:

- YAGAN (c.1795-1833) in south-west Western Australia
- FANNY BALBUK (1840-1907) in south-west Western Australia
- BILIN BILIN (c.1820-1901) in south-east Queensland
- KAMALYARRPA JAPANANGKA (or 'Bullfrog') and the 1928 Coniston massacre in Central Australia.

Work through the four case studies. Groups may be allocated one each, or you may want to individually study all four.

After you have examined all the information on a case study complete a summary table like this.

	Yagan 	Fanny Balbuk 	Bilin Bilin 	Kamalyarrpa Japanangka ('Bullfrog') 
Who was this person?				
Where did the events take place?				
When did the events take place?				
Why was there a need for resistance?				
What was the main type of resistance shown?				
How successful was this resistance? Why?				
What is your opinion towards this person?				
How is this person remembered today?				

After you explore these case studies in class, use this as a model to investigate what happened in your own area.