a legend

The Rainbow Serpent

An Aboriginal legend from Australia

The Dreamtime is the foundation of Aboriginal religion and culture. It is the story of how the universe was formed and how human beings were created about 65,000 years ago.

Long ago in the Dreamtime, a group of Aborigines were out hunting[1]. After several hours, they grew tired and decided to rest and as they sat around, telling stories and warming their hands by the fire, one of them looked up. There on the horizon was a beautiful multi-coloured arch – a rainbow. But the Aborigines thought that it was a serpent moving from one waterhole to another and they were frightened.

One young man wanted to know more about the Rainbow Serpent. The old men of his tribe told him that the Rainbow Serpent was one of the Dreamtime creatures who had shaped[2] Earth. In the beginning Earth was flat. As the Rainbow Serpent found his way across the land, the movement of his body formed the mountains and the valleys where the rivers lived. He was the biggest of the Dreamtime beings[3] and his power scared even the other Dreamtime creatures.

1. hunt: *chasser* 2. shape = create 3. a being = a living thing, a creature

At last, the Rainbow Serpent crawled into a waterhole where he lay in the cool water. Each time the animals visited the waterhole, they were careful not to disturb the water, for although they could not see him they knew he was there. He only came out after heavy rainstorms, when his waterhole was disturbed and when the sun touched his coloured body. Then he rose up from the waterhole and travelled over the tree-tops, up through the clouds and across the plain to another waterhole.

The people were fearful that he was angry and would destroy the land once again, so they were very quiet and still[4] as he moved to his new home. Once he was there, he disappeared beneath[5] the water again and was not to be seen.
That is why Aborigines are careful not to disturb the Rainbow Serpent, as they see him going across the sky, from one waterhole to another.

4. still: immobile
5. beneath = under

SHHHH!