

Basic Detail Report



Message Stick

Date

mid 19th - early 20th Century

Medium

Wood and pigment

Description

Message sticks enabled important communications to be passed between various Aboriginal Australian groups. As there are hundreds of different languages and dialects

spoken, a common mechanism for communication was essential. The symbols and markings on the sticks were not a script to be read, but rather a mnemonic device for messengers. Messengers would use these symbols to accurately relay notices, invitations, requests and announcements to a translator. In addition, message sticks served as a type of passport. With it in hand, a messenger could safely pass through the lands of various nations and clan groupings without incident.

Dimensions

6 1/2 × 1/2 × 1/2 in. (16.5 × 1.3 × 1.3 cm)