

ARTIST
KATHLEEN
RAMBLER
WORKS WITH
A TABLET

INDIGEMOJI

BY INDIA SHACKLEFORD



Kaytetye speakers, artists, technologists and linguists have teamed up to create the Kaytetyemoji app! They hope to teach a new generation of Kaytetye language speakers through the art of emoji.



ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

Australia is home to more than 250 Indigenous languages, and 800 different dialects. Each language is specific to its People and place.

Language is an important part of identity. For thousands of years, cultures all around the world have used language to pass on stories, knowledge, law and geography.

Unfortunately, a lot of these languages are in danger. Kaytetye (kay-ditch) is one such endangered language, with only 109 speakers recorded in the 2021 census. It's spoken by the Kaytetye People, whose Country is north of Mparntwe/Alice Springs in Central Australia.

It would be easy to see phones and computers as a threat. But Kaytetye speakers reckon that technology could be the key to saving their language instead!

MAKING AN EMOJI

The first emoji was created in 1999 by Japanese artist Shigetaka Kurita. Initially, emoji were limited to simple icons representing things such as weather, traffic and the time. Since the 1990s, the emoji list has continued to grow, with new additions like the goose and moose emoji in 2023.

It's a lengthy and difficult process to get new emoji added to the Unicode official list. For this reason, the Kaytetyemoji team decided to make their own sticker set based on Kaytetye language and culture.

At the beginning of 2022, a group of Kaytetye speakers met and began to brainstorm ideas for Kaytetyemoji. They contacted Indigemoji, who'd previously created Australia's first Aboriginal emoji set for the Arrernte (ah-ruhn-duh) language. Together, they worked to design, code and translate emoji to match important words in Kaytetye life and culture.



EMOJI ARE
USED IN LOTS
OF WAYS TO
HELP TEACH
KAYTETYE

KAYTETYEMOJI

The Kaytetyemoji app contains 112 different emoji, each representing different words and aspects of life on Kaytetye Country. The app allows users to see and hear words spoken in the language and includes an example of the word in a sentence.

"One of the benefits of the app is having short and simple things to learn," says Dr Myfany Turpin, who is a linguist (a scientist who studies language).

"It's an entry point if you're starting from scratch, but you can also go further and listen to sentences!"

A favourite emoji of the Kaytetyemoji team members is artnke, which means flat-topped hill. Artnke are a key feature in the landscape around Barrow Creek.

"You'll see them while you are driving," Myfany explains. They are symbol of Kaytetye country, in a similar way that the Opera House is a symbol of Sydney.



THREE
GENERATIONS
OF PHILLIP'S
FAMILY WERE
INVOLVED
IN CREATING
KAYTETYEMOJI!

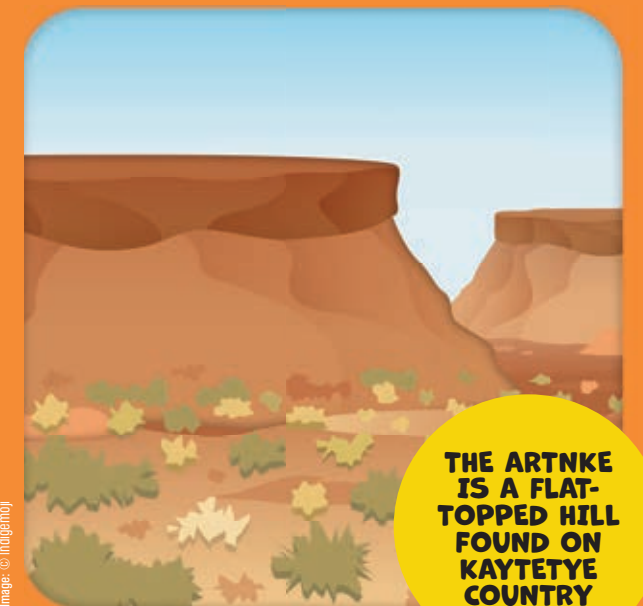
CONNECTING WITH KIDS

Phillip Janima is a Kaytetye speaker who provided audio for the emoji, along with his father and niece. He hopes the app will encourage young people to engage with language and culture.

"We're trying to help all these young ones going to school [which is in English] to learn [Kaytetye]," says Phillip.

He also emphasises the connection between culture and language.

"[When] people do things that involve Kaytetye language, it's perfect for it – like ceremony and hunting. When those activities stop...part of the language stops."



THE ARTNKE
IS A FLAT-
TOPPED HILL
FOUND ON
KAYTETYE
COUNTRY



GIF AWAY

The team is also keen to explore GIFs as another way of digitising the Kaytetye language. Hand signs are an important part of Kaytetye language and can help listeners to tell the difference between homophones. These are words that that sound the same, but mean different things, such as horse and hoarse, or knew and new!

