
Artist Research Card

Kaylene Whiskey

Yankunytjatjara · APY Lands, South Australia · Born 1976

Unit: Make Your Mark · Year 8 Visual Arts · Used in Lesson 3 – Other Voices

Who is Kaylene Whiskey?

Kaylene Whiskey is a Yankunytjatjara woman born in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) in 1976. She lives and works in Indulkana, a remote community on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the far north-west of South Australia. She makes her paintings at Iwantja Arts, an Indigenous-owned and governed art centre in her community.

She is self-taught. She grew up with two things in her ears at the same time: the Dreaming stories of her Elders, and the music of Dolly Parton, Tina Turner, Cher and Michael Jackson on the radio. Both of those things are in every painting she makes.

In 2018 she won the Sulman Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In 2019 she won the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award. In 2025 she published her first major art book, *Do You Believe in Love?* In 2025 her work was celebrated in a major survey at the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra (Whiskey, 2025).

What does she make?

Kaylene Whiskey paints her favourite icons, including Dolly Parton, Tina Turner, Wonder Woman, Catwoman, Cher and Princess Leia, into the Kungkarangkalpa Tjukurpa, the Seven Sisters Story. This is one of the most significant and widely shared Dreaming stories across the APY Lands, a story of seven ancestral women travelling across Country (Whiskey, 2025).

In her paintings, these heroic women, both the pop icons and the ancestral figures, are shown in Indulkana. They are hunting bush tucker, collecting native tobacco (mingkulpa), dancing, partying and living community life. Dolly Parton gathers honey ants. Wonder Woman hunts. Cher sits under a desert tree.

Her visual language combines dot painting, flat colour and bold outlines, text bubbles and speech, neon and electric colour alongside earthy desert tones, and pattern and repetition across the entire surface of the canvas.

Why does she make it?

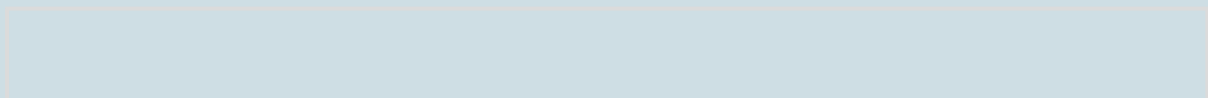
Kaylene Whiskey has said: “I love to paint my favourite kungkas. They are strong women” (Whiskey, 2025). The word *kungka* in Yankunytjatjara means woman, of any age. She paints women she admires, women who are powerful, women who are joyful.

She is not choosing between her Anangu culture and the contemporary world. She is saying: both of these things are mine. Both are real. Both belong here together.

Her joy is not separate from her cultural assertion. It is the assertion. By painting Anangu life as vivid, alive, full of pop stars and Dreaming stories simultaneously, she is saying: we are still here, we are contemporary, and we are entirely ourselves.

Look at these works

Study each image carefully before reading the quote and answering the questions below.





Kaylene Whiskey – Dolly visits Indulkana, 2020, acrylic on linen with plastic jewels, 168 x 198.5 cm. Art Gallery of New South Wales. © Kaylene Whiskey.
<https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/167.2020/>



Kaylene Whiskey – Seven Sistas Sign, 2021, water-based enamel paint on metal, 75 x 270 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. © Kaylene Whiskey. Courtesy the artist, Iwantja Arts and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/147970/>



Kaylene Whiskey – Seven Sisters Song, 2021, enamel paint on road sign, 120 x 180 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. © Kaylene Whiskey. Courtesy the artist, Iwantja Arts and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.
<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/artist/34421/>

“Us younger ones are from the generation that grew up with Coca-Cola and TV as well as Tjukurpa (cultural stories) and bush tucker, so we like to have a bit of fun with combining those two different worlds.”

Kaylene Whiskey (Iwantja Arts, n.d.)

Response

Look at the images and the quote above. Take your time. Then answer each question in your own words.

Question 1 – Projection: Reading the artist

What feeling do you think Kaylene Whiskey needed to express in her work?
What couldn't she say any other way?

Write your response here.

Question 2 – Reception: Reading yourself

What feeling does her work give YOU when you look at it? What do you notice in yourself when you look at these paintings?

Write your response here.

Question 3 – Joy and cultural identity

How do you see joy and cultural identity connected in Kaylene Whiskey's work? Why do you think she paints joy the way she does?

Write your response here.

Question 4 – Freedom and tradition

Kaylene Whiskey works within a specific cultural tradition, Anangu Dreaming, the APY Lands, her community, and yet her work feels completely free. Where do you see that freedom in the work? What do you think gives her that freedom?

This is a harder question, take your time, there is no single right answer.

Write your response here.

Visual Language – Key terms

Dot painting – a traditional Anangu mark-making technique in which meaning is built through pattern and repetition of dots

Tjukurpa – the Anangu framework of law, story, knowledge and connection to Country that underpins all cultural practice. It is not past tense. It is ongoing.

Country – in Aboriginal Australian cultures, Country is not just land but the entire living system of place, knowledge, story and relationship

Flat colour – areas of solid, unmodulated colour with no shading or shadow, associated with graphic design and comic art

Composition – how elements are arranged across the picture plane

Visual narrative – a story told through images rather than words

Iconography – the use of symbols and figures that carry specific cultural or symbolic meaning

Juxtaposition – placing two very different things side by side to create meaning through contrast

Teacher Notes

This resource is used in Lesson 3 of the unit *Make Your Mark* (Year 8 Visual Arts). It is designed to scaffold student engagement with Kaylene Whiskey's work before and during the artist introduction phase of the lesson.

Whiskey is one of the clearest examples of the unit's deepest learning objective in practice. She did not wait for permission. She claimed what was hers. Her culture, her Elders' stories, her love of Dolly Parton and then made it visible on her own terms, in her own community, through her own art centre. She claimed the stone from the myth Sisyphus And she did it with joy, which makes it even more radical. That is what the unit invites students to do. Where the unit arc moves from resistance to agency, Whiskey skips the suffering entirely and she goes straight to claiming, with glitter and Dolly Parton. That directness is worth naming for students.

Diverse learners: students who find written response difficult may respond verbally or visually. The four questions can be answered through drawing, annotation or discussion rather than extended writing.

Images must be sourced by the teacher from approved educational resources. Recommended sources: AIATSIS (aiatsis.gov.au), the National Gallery of Victoria (ngv.vic.gov.au), the National Portrait Gallery (portrait.gov.au), or Iwantja Arts (iwantjaarts.com.au). Or use the book: ‘**The art of Kaylene Whiskey**’

Curriculum alignment: VCAVAE033, VCAVAE034, VCAVAR038, VCAVAR039.
Cross-curriculum priority: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.

References

Art Gallery of New South Wales. (2020). **Kaylene Whiskey: Dolly visits Indulkana**. <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/167.2020/> Iwantja Arts. (n.d.). **Kungka Kunpu**. <https://www.iwantjaarts.com.au/projects/kungka-kunpu>

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. (2024). **Victorian Curriculum F–10 Version 2.0: Visual Arts**. <https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au>

Whiskey, K. (2025). **The art of Kaylene Whiskey: Do you believe in love?** (N. King, Ed.). Thames & Hudson Australia.