One of the things that many people love about learning Language is the way that there are layers of meaning behind so many of the words. The more you learn, the deeper you go into Culture.

“Some of those animals are spirit beings. And so their name is not just reflective of what the animal does, it’s reflective because the animal is also part of the spirit world. Sometimes you can’t really get a handle on the name until you realise that it’s a spirit name for the animal. When you start seeing those things, it transforms your feeling of being in the bush. Because you realise you’re surrounded by the spirits. And it makes walking through the bush an entirely different experience. And I would like the language to be used in that way.” - Bruce Pascoe

Learning culture through language

There are many striking differences between the ways that Aboriginal languages describe the world and the ways this is done in English. For example, there’s a stronger focus on differences between male and female in many Aboriginal languages than there is in English. Some languages use the same word for a tool or object and for the material that it’s made from: a basket may have the same name as a type of grass. Words for family members are different too - reflecting different ways of understanding how people relate to each other in Aboriginal culture.

“It’s not just the words, it’s all the meanings and the knowledge, the cultural knowledge. So it’s a whole thing you’re reviving, not just words and sounds.” - Vicki Couzens

Language ways can be used in English also

It’s also good to celebrate all of the ways that Language is part of the way people use English. All of this knowledge is part of the resources that people bring to language revival. In his novel Earth, author Bruce Pascoe uses lots of Aboriginal English:

“Tell you babies liddle story ‘bout long time before … oh plenny warm that time… long long walk all over that country that time, walk all way to Condah, all big mobs there, big boonea fishin’ goin’ on, an’ all us peoples in stone warrun…”
LANGUAGE REVIVAL WORKSHOP
EXPLORING DEEPER MEANINGS IN WORDS

For this workshop choose some place names such as the name of your town, or a mountain, river or lake etc in your Country.

- Study the word or phrase.
- Check each element in the resources you have for the language (for example a word list or dictionary. You may also want to check the VACL publication series Aboriginal Placenames of Victoria.) List any meanings you can find.
- There might be several meanings given.
  - Compare the meanings.
  - What do the meanings have in common?
- Think about the place in a cultural way.
  - What do you know about this place?
  - Are there stories connected to this place?
  - How do the stories and meanings make you see, feel, understand about this place?
- Do any of the ideas you have collected make 'sense'?

Use this discussion to start a booklet of place names for use in your community. Ask Elders and community about the places. Once you have collected some names and their meanings, you can build on this and gather more. Add photos of the places to make an attractive but inexpensive booklet that is simple to produce.