

Bininj Kunwok Skin Names and Kinship Terms

Kuninjku, Kune, Kundedjnjenghmi, Mayali - Maningrida-Bulman-Pine Creek Region

Bininj society is organised into eight subsections, or 'skin' groups. These are used to address people and to refer to people. They affect marriage choice and determine 'moiety'. Newcomers may be assigned a skin name, and with it, a place in the Bininj social world.

	NGARRADJKU	MARDKU
YIRRIDJJA	kodjdjan [♀] Ⓐ kodjok [♂]	ngarridjdjan [♀] Ⓐ ngarridj [♂]
DUWA	belinj [♀] Ⓑ balang [♂]	kamanj [♀] Ⓑ kamarrang [♂]

same cell as you

cell above/below yours

cell left/right from yours*

cell diagonal from yours

siblings and parallel cousins: <u>ngadburrung</u> [♀] yabok [♀] kokok [♂] rdarda mother's mother: kakkak [♀] father's father: mawah [♂]	mother and her sisters: karrang [♀] mother's brothers: ngadjadj [♂] a woman's (sister's) children: djedje a man's sister's children: kangkinj mother's mother's mother: doydoy [♀]	your poison cousin: <u>nakurrng</u> [♂] = <u>ngalkurrng</u> [♀] = father and his brothers: ngabba [♂] father's sisters: berluh [♀] a man's (brother's) children: korlonj a woman's brother's children: korlonj	cross cousins: <u>kanjok</u> [♀] potential spouses: kakkali [♀] mother's father: mamamh [♂] father's mother: mamamh [♀]
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Use the underlined term by default. Terms that are not gender specific apply to the person's siblings as well. *Presumes right-way marriage. [♀]You call each other this. Skin names are bestowed by mothers to their children following the cyclic pattern Ⓐ→Ⓑ→Ⓒ→Ⓓ→Ⓐ © 2017 Steven Bird and Alexandra Marley (kunwok.org)



Bininj Kunwok Skin Names and Kinship Terms

Kunwinjku - Gunbalanya Region

Bininj society is organised into eight subsections, or 'skin' groups. These are used to address people and to refer to people. They affect marriage choice and determine 'moiety'. Newcomers may be assigned a skin name, and with it, a place in the Bininj social world.

	NGARRADJKU		MARDKU	
YIRRIDJJA	ngalwamud [♀] (A) nawamud [♂]	(C) ngalkamarrang [♀] nakamarrang [♂]	ngalwakadj [♀] (A) nawakadj [♂]	(C) ngalkangila [♀] nakangila [♂]
DUWA	ngalngarridj [♀] (B) nangarridj [♂]	(D) ngalbulanj [♀] nabulanj [♂]	ngalbangardi [♀] (B) nabangardi [♂]	(D) ngalkodjok [♀] nakodjok [♂]

same cell as you

cell above/below yours

cell left/right from yours*

cell diagonal from yours

siblings and parallel cousins: <u>ngadburrung</u> [♀] yabok [♀] kokok [♂] rdarda mother's mother: kakkak [♀] father's father: mawah [♀]	mother and her sisters: karrang [♀] mother's brothers: ngadjadj [♂] a woman's (sister's) children: djedje a man's sister's children: kangkinj mother's mother's mother: doydoy [♀]	your poison cousin: <u>nakurrng</u> ^{♂=} <u>ngalkurrng</u> ^{♀=} father and his brothers: ngabba [♂] father's sisters: berluh [♀] a man's (brother's) children: korlonj a woman's brother's children: korlonj	cross cousins: <u>kanjok</u> [♀] potential spouses: kakkali [♀] mother's father: mamamh [♀] father's mother: makkah [♀]
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Bininj Kunwok Skin Names and Kinship Terms

Kundjeyhmi - Jabiru Region

Bininj society is organised into eight subsections, or 'skin' groups. These are used to address people and to refer to people. They affect marriage choice and determine 'moiety'. Newcomers may be assigned a skin name, and with it, a place in the Bininj social world.

	NGARRADJKU		MARDKU	
YIRRIDJJA	alwamud [♀] (A) nawamud [♂]	© alkamarrang [♀] nakamarrang [♂]	alwakadj [♀] (A) nawakadj [♂]	© alkanigila [♀] nakangila [♂]
DUWA	alngarridj [♀] (B) nangarridj [♂]	(D) albulanj [♀] nabulanj [♂]	albangardi [♀] (B) nabangardi [♂]	(D) alkodjok [♀] nakodjok [♂]

same cell as you

cell above/below yours

cell left/right from yours*

cell diagonal from yours

siblings and parallel cousins: <u>ngadburrung</u> [♀] yabok [♀] kokok [♂] rdarda mother's mother: kakkak [♀] father's father: mawah [♀]	mother and her sisters: karrang [♀] mother's brothers: ngadjadj [♂] a woman's (sister's) children: djedje a man's sister's children: kangkinj mother's mother's mother: doydoy [♀]	your poison cousin: <u>nakurrng</u> [♂] = <u>alkurrng</u> [♀] = father and his brothers: ngabba [♂] father's sisters: berluh [♀] a man's (brother's) children: korlonj a woman's brother's children: korlonj	cross cousins: <u>kanjok</u> [♀] potential spouses: kakkali [♀] mother's father: mamamh [♀] father's mother: makkah [♀]
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Use the underlined term by default. Terms that are not gender specific apply to the person's siblings as well. *Presumes right-way marriage. [♀]You call each other this. Skin names are bestowed by mothers to their children following the cyclic pattern (A)→(B)→(C)→(D)→(A) © 2017 Steven Bird and Alexandra Marley (kunwok.org)



Skin and Kinship in West Arnhem

Getting Started

Learning the Bininj skin and kinship system is as rewarding as it is challenging. At first, the complexity is overwhelming. Yet it is not so different from multiplication tables or the periodic table; it takes years of immersion and application. Your Bininj friends will help you.

The terms vary depending on location; pick the right chart for your location but don't be surprised if your friends prefer different terms: people move around after all.

Step 1: Use people's skin names

Everyone has a skin name. You can use it to address them or refer to them, and this is preferable to using their name. There are just eight skin names, in male and female versions. It's not many, though you'll need to ask for help to pronounce them correctly.

You can ask someone to tell you their skin name with: *baleh kunkurlah?* Don't worry if you have to ask several times... people appreciate the fact that you're making an effort. You might add people's names to the chart.

Step 2: Learn the skin name patterns

Skin names are not randomly assigned, but they flow from a mother to her children following the pattern $A \rightarrow B \rightarrow C \rightarrow D \rightarrow A$. If you know a woman's skin name you can work out how to refer to her children.

For each person you know, memorise the skin name of his or her mother, using the above pattern in reverse. For each woman you know, memorise the male and female skin names of her children.

After a while you will have learnt all of the skin names, and the cyclic pattern.

Step 3: Know your moieties

In common with other Aboriginal societies, Bininj divide the world into halves (moieties), *Yirridjdja* and *Duwa*, and *Ngarradjku* and *Mardku*. These are important in ceremonies. Consult the chart to find out your moieties.

Notice that your siblings are in the same quadrant as you. So are your mother's sister's children and your father's brother's children* (parallel cousins), also known as cousin sisters and cousin brothers.

Your "right-skin", the category of people you can marry, have opposite moieties to you. You find them in the diagonally opposite quadrant. Your mother's brother's children and father's sister's children (cross cousins) are here as well (assuming right-way marriage).

Your mother shares one of your moieties: you are both *Ngarradjku* or both *Mardku*. Your father shares the other moiety: you are both *Yirridjdja* or both *Duwa*.

Step 4: Use kinship terms

If you have a skin name, then everyone is related to you. For close relatives you acknowledge the relationship using a kin term, e.g. you would call your mother *karrang* "mum". You might use this term with anyone who has the same skin as your mother. The main kinship terms are shown at the bottom of the chart.

If you don't know how you are related to someone, you can still show your knowledge of the kinship system by using the default kinship term. You can ask what to call someone using *Njale marneyime? What do I call you?*

Kinship terms are ultimately based on the relationship. Thus you call your father *ngabba* regardless of his skin name or whether he married right-way.

Step 5: Learn to disambiguate people

Try referring to people by their skin name, followed by their clan name in order to disambiguate. You can also disambiguate people according to age: *wurdyaw* (baby), *wurdurd* (child), *yawkyawk* (young woman), *yawurrinj* (young man), *bininj* (man), *daluk* (woman), *nakohbanj* (old man), *ngalkohbanj* (old woman). Another option is to use descriptive words: *kodjbarla* (bald), *nakimuk*, *ngalkimuk* (big),

Why it matters

Every culture has conventions about how to address people. The same individual might be referred to variously as: *Kim*, *Dr Smith*, *Mum*, *Madam*, and *Kimmy*. To use the wrong term of address would be a faux pas. Disinterest in learning the appropriate way to address people announces that you are an outsider, and shows disrespect of local custom.

In many Aboriginal cultures, it is rude to address someone by name. "The name is like an intimate part of the body, with which another person does not take liberties" (William Stanner, *The Dreaming*, 1953).

For more information

The skin and kinship chart is part of a collection of materials designed for learning the Bininj Kunwok language of West Arnhem, hosted at kunwok.org.

Steven Bird and Alexandra Marley

