Key Idea
Identity is shaped not only by beliefs, knowledge and practices, but also influenced by contexts, concepts and contemporary conditions. An individual’s identity is unique and it changes over time. For contemporary Aboriginal artist Peter Waples-Crowe, his identity is informed by both his Aboriginal heritage, as a Ngarigo man, and his personal relationships, as a gay man. For his artwork Ngarigo Queen – Cloak of queer visibility 2018 Waples-Crowe re-worked the form of the possum skin cloak. Possum skin cloaks tell stories of the owner’s family and country. Starting out as a few pelts sewn together, used to keep a baby born in South-Eastern Australia warm, as a child grew its cloak would grow with it. Each pelt added to an individual’s cloak would further explain their place in the community as well as contain visual information related to boundaries of country, places for good hunting, and tribal lore. When the wearer died, the cloak would become a shroud for burial.1 Each cloak was deeply personal and indivisible from the individual who wore it.

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1 https://www.luminacollective.com.au/4248205-home-on-country#0
Waples-Crowe’s cloak is exaggerated, with a long train like a glamorous royal robe, whilst the interior is inscribed with diamond designs derived from South-Eastern shields, and colours arranged in the rainbow spectrum to evoke the pride flag. Waples-Crowe has created a contemporary artwork by symbolically unifying facets of his identity to reflect how he sees his role within his community – as a proud, queer elder.

Inquiry Questions
- Who do you think might wear this cloak?
- Do the patterns on the inside remind you of anything?
- Why do you think the rainbow has been included on the inside?

Process
1. This is a visual analysis activity. Begin with a simple **objective observation**. You don’t need to come to any conclusions, just mentally list everything that you notice about the artwork. *What is in front of you? From what material is it made? What art form is it — sculpture, drawing, fashion?*
2. Speculate and **interpret**. What do you wonder about the artwork? Why have these materials been chosen? Why has the artist used this technique? What makes you curious? Try to interpret the artist’s interests or concerns.
3. Conclude by **linking** your observations and your interpretations together. As long as your interpretations are linked to what you can observe in the artwork you can justify your conclusions. For instance, if you recognise a symbol in the artwork you can interpret the meaning of that symbol as a part of the meaning of the artwork.
4. **Reflect**. Think about different facets of your personality and identity — what makes you... you? Think of how you could use a similar method to Peter Waples-Crowe to create an artwork about your identity.

Key Objectives
- To provide an opportunity for students to consider how Indigenous artists can express cultural heritage and other aspects of identity creatively within their artworks
- To explore how artists use materials, techniques and technologies to realise their intentions
- To guide students to analyse how ideas and viewpoints are expressed within artworks and interpreted by audiences

Cross-curriculum priority: Learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

Support Material
- Peter Waples-Crowe Artist Website: [https://peterwaplescrowe.wordpress.com/](https://peterwaplescrowe.wordpress.com/)

**A useful explanation of ‘Queer’ for younger students:**
Queer is another word for different from normal. When a few different things are together in one place that is called diversity -- for example, when different people gather together they form a diverse community. The rainbow is a symbol for that, all the colours with their unique qualities side-by-side, different but equal. When Aboriginal people were taken from their land and families many important personal differences between people were not allowed. This artwork is about reclaiming those differences, and being proud of them.