

Kinship System

The Kukatja family

Everyone born into a Kukatja family has a kinship or “skin” name as well as a given name. A girl’s skin name begins with **N** and a boy’s with **Tj**. Two examples are Nangala and Tjangala. Brothers and sisters are paired into eight skin groups, shown as large dots in diagram 1. In a particular family brothers and sisters belong to the same skin group. As an extended family everyone in one group calls each other sister or brother. All Nangala females are skin sisters of Tjangala males, all Tjapanangka are skin brothers of Napanangka. The pairs in each skin group are not marriage partners. A person finds a partner in an opposite group, as the green lines of the diagram show.

Nyuparra — Husband-and-Wife, Marriage

A skin name is kept throughout life and is very important. When a person marries there is one other group from which partners should be chosen. Such marriages are “straight skin” and are preferred. There are other groups into which it is forbidden to marry (the most critical of these is shown in diagram 7). Marriage with a forbidden partner would be “wrong skin” or “not tjugarni.”

Diagram 1 shows the “straight marriage” lines. Tjampitjin men may marry Napangarti women, and Nampitjin women may marry Tjapangarti men. Because of the skin groups, all Tjampitjin men call Napangarti women nyupa, as do all Napangarti women call Tjampitjin men. They are like husbands and wives (nyuparra) to one another, with social obligations and roles, especially in caring for those in need. In the same way all Nampitjin and Napangarti women are like sisters-in-law (mantirri) and Tjampitjin and Tjapangarti men are brothers-in-law (makurmta). This applies to all the groups linked by the marriage lines.

Can you tell from which skin group Nungurrayi women accept partners if they are to marry “straight skin”?

What group is mantirri for a Napurrula woman?

nyupa: wife or husband
kurta: brother
tjutu: sister
makurmta: brother-in-law
mantirri: sister-in-law

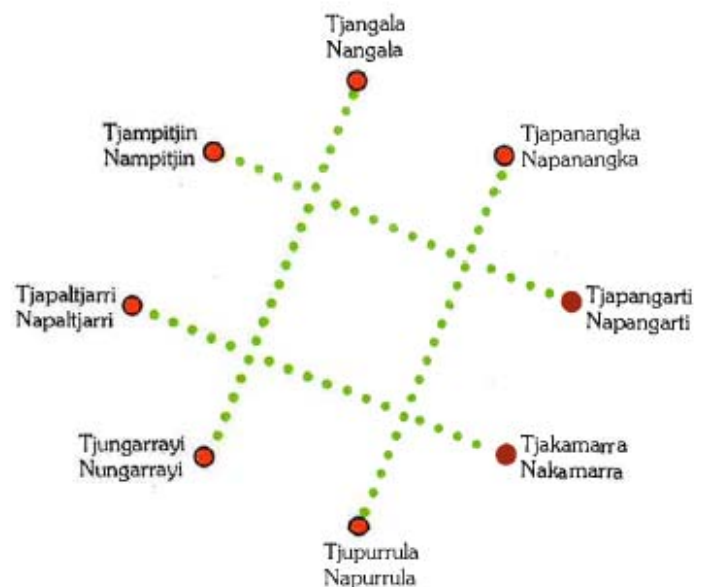
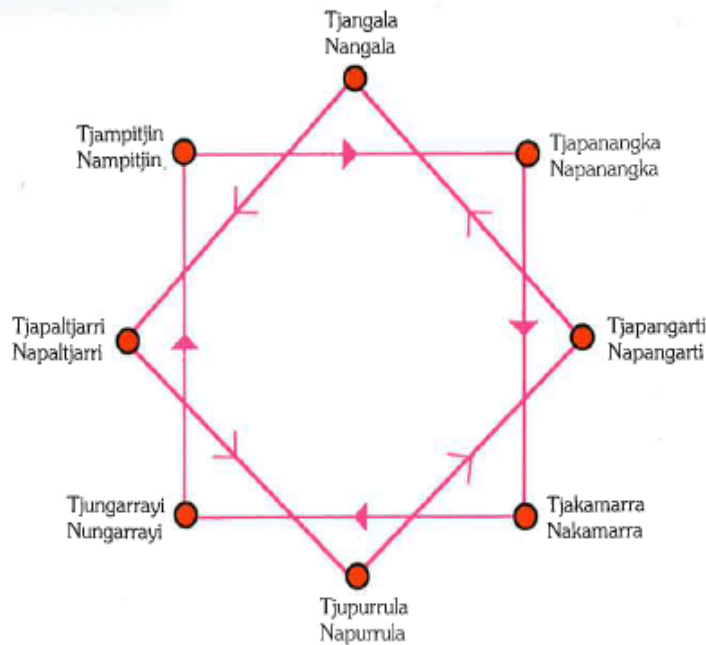


Diagram 1

Tjiitji — Children
Yipi — Mother



yipi: mother
mama: father
yurmtal: daughter
yurmtalpa: niece, nephew
katja: son
kamuru: uncle
lamparr: father-in-law
lamparr: son-in law

Diagram 2

Diagram 2 shows how to name the skin of the children (tjiitji). We look to the mother (yipi) to know the skin group of her tjiitji. The arrows lead from the yipi to her children. For example a Nangala mother will have Napaltjarri daughters (yurmtal) and her daughters will have Napurrula daughters. Only after four generations will the yurmtal again be Nangala. You can see from the diagram that there are two separate ongoing cycles of birth, each with its own direction.

As an exercise: can you name the skin of the tjiitji (girls and boys) of a Napangangka yipi?

Kamuru — Uncle
Yurmtalpa — Niece, Nephew

The mother's brother will be the children's uncle. The arrows lead from the kamuru to his yurmtalpa. If Nangala is the mother, her Napaltjarri and Tjapaltjarri children will have Tjangala uncles. The Nangala woman

has a Tjungarrayi husband, but his brothers, who are also Tjungarrayi, are *not* uncles to those Napaltjarri/Tjapaltjarri children. Instead they are seen as fathers, in the social sense of an extended family. In the extended family Nakamarra women are seen as mothers for Tjungarrayi and Nungarrayi children, just as Tjapaltjarri men act as fathers to them, in matters of responsibility and social etiquette. This shows that you can always tell the skin name of a person if you know the skin of the mother, and vice versa.

If a boy is the yurmtalpa of a Tjampitjin man, what skin was his yipi?

Lamparr — Father-in-law/Son-in-law

Diagram 2 also shows who a person's lamparr will be. The arrows lead from son-in-law to his father-in-law.

Who is the father-in-law of Tjapangarti?

Kaparli — Maternal Grandmother/Grandchild
Tjamu — Maternal Grandfather/Grandchild

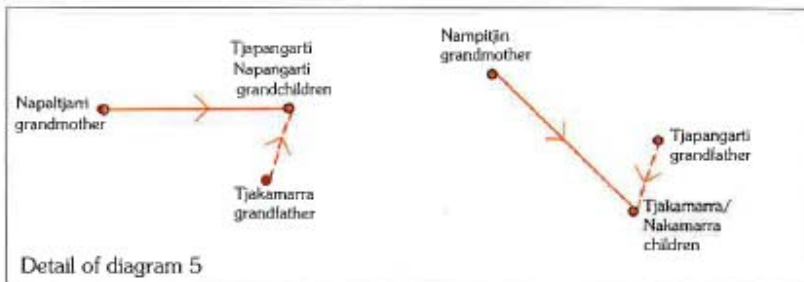
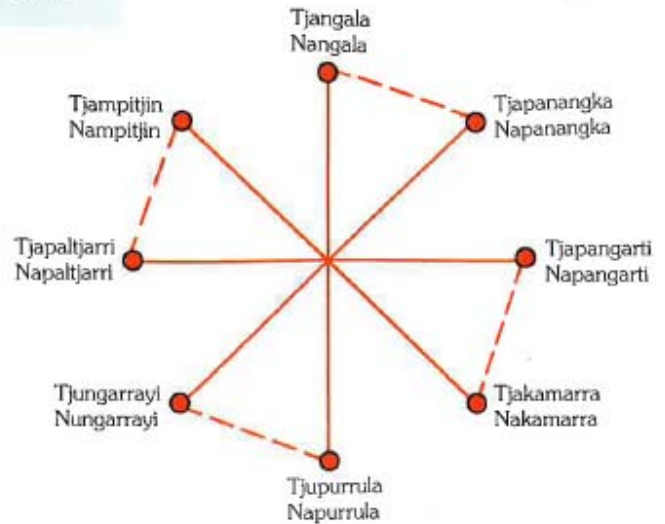
Diagram 5

In diagram 5, the line from grandchildren to their maternal grandfather is the same as the line between cousins.

In the detail from diagram 5, you may see that grandchildren are directly opposite their maternal grandmother's skin group.

Can you find the skin group of the grandmother and grandfather of Tjupurrula/Napurrula?

(You could do this by tracing back three generations of female descent on the pink lines in diagram 2, starting with Napurrula.)



Parnku — Cousins

The orange lines show that Nampitjin/Tjampitjin persons are cousins of Napaltjarri/Tjapaltjarri. As an alternative to the preferred marriages of diagram 1, Kukatja people may choose to marry a person of a cousin's skin group, or a person from the same group as their maternal grandmother, shown in diagram 5. This is not a "straight skin" marriage, but children from such a marriage will always follow the normal pattern by deriving their skin group from their mother, as in diagram 2.

If a Napurrula has a Tjungarrayi for nyupa, she has married her skin-.....?

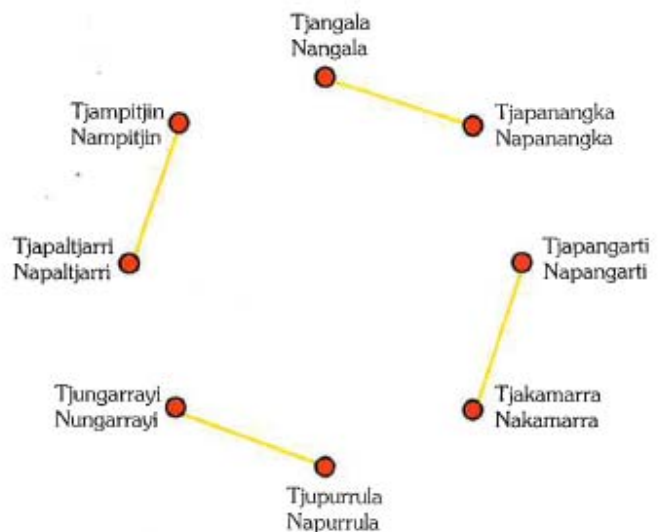
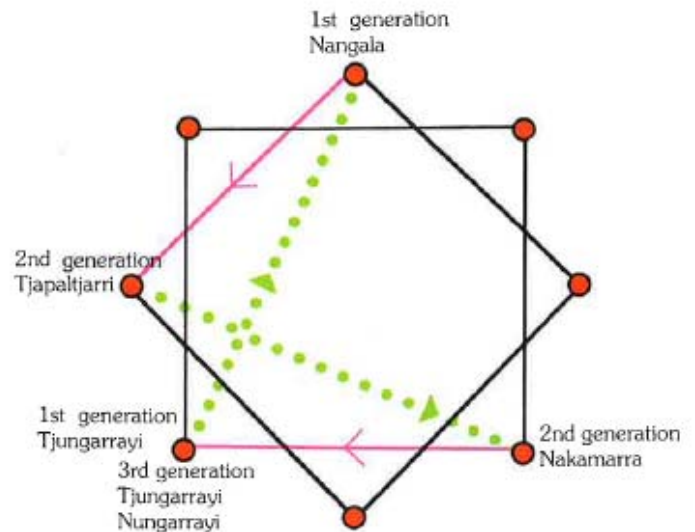


Diagram 6

Ngawatji — Paternal Grandmother/Grandchild
Kirlaki — Paternal Grandfather/Grandchild

Diagram 3

By combining diagrams 1 and 2 we can trace the paternal grandparents of any skin group. In diagram 3 we begin with a Tjungarrayi man and his Nangala wife, then trace forward through the male line of descent, starting with the children, who are Tjapaltjarri and Napaltjarri. That Tjapaltjarri son marries a Nakamarra woman and *their* children are Tjungarrayi and Nungarrayi. You can discover, as you continue to trace the male line of descent, that the skin name always “comes back” to where it started, so that the grandchildren carry the same skin name as their grandfather (the granddaughters have the matching skin name of that group).



How many generations in the male line does it take for the skin name to “come back”?



Mama — Father
Tjiitji — Children

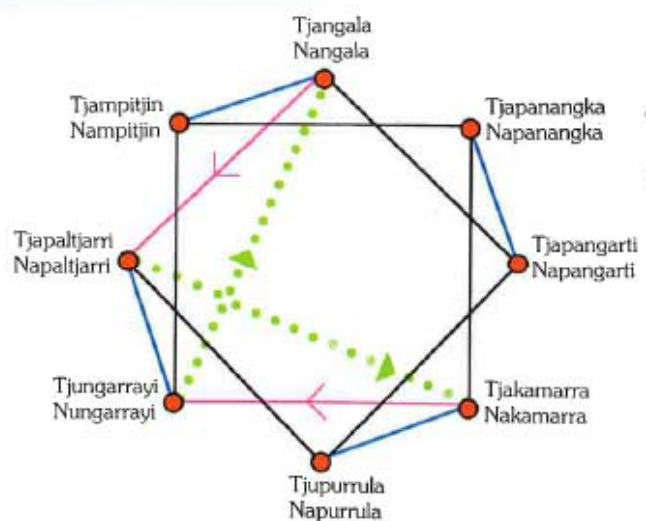
Pimiri — Aunty
Yurntalpa — Niece, Nephew

By now you may be able to follow this diagram for yourself. The blue lines show the fathers of the children, the male descent lines. These lines also show the aunts of the children, since they are the sisters of the father and are grouped together with them. Nungarrayi women are aunts to Tjapaltjarri/Napaltjarri children.

What skin is the mama (this is the Kukatja word) of a Nakamarra girl?



Can you find the skin name of the pimiri of Napangarti or Tjapangarti tjiitji?



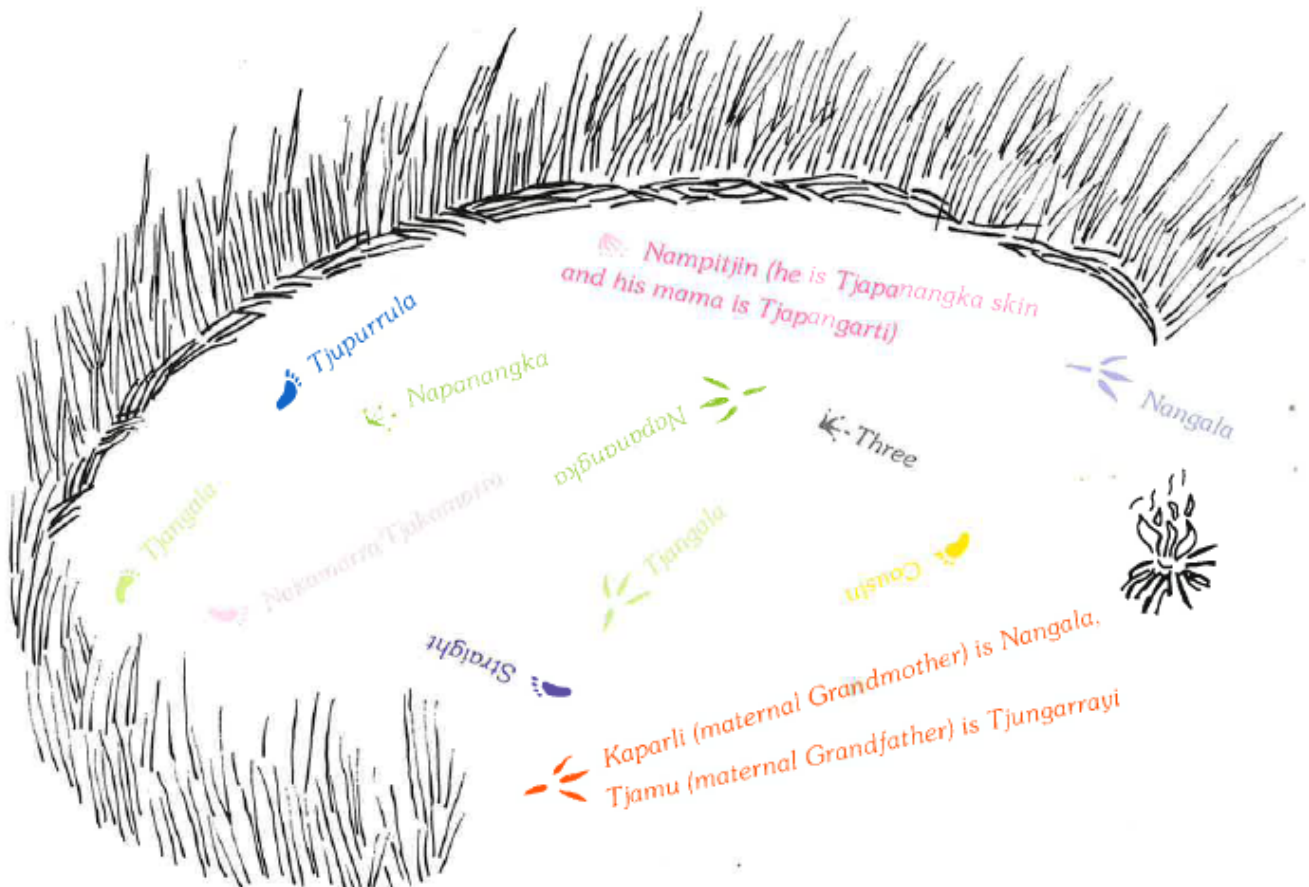
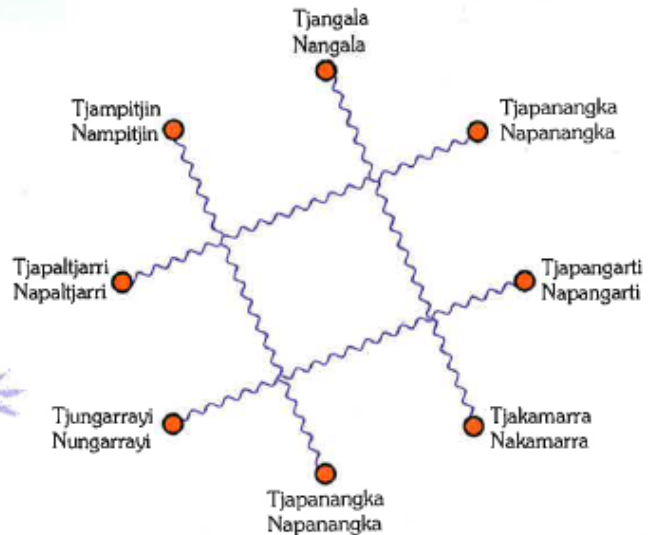
Yumari — Mother-in-law/Son-in-law
Ngunyarri — Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law

Diagram 7

The purple lines show the mother-in-law taboo. Yumari must avoid speaking to one another, or touching, or being familiar, or even looking at one another. In that way, the son-in-law should show respect for his mother-in-law. It is all right for daughters-in-law to have contact with mothers-in-law. The Black Goanna, in his story, does the wrong thing because he offends against this taboo: he even tries to marry his mother-in-law!

Can you tell the skin of Tjakamarra's yumari?

Was he "straight skin" or "wrong skin" for that Napaltjarri young woman?



Kukatja Pattern of Life

All these links between people can be combined into one diagram.

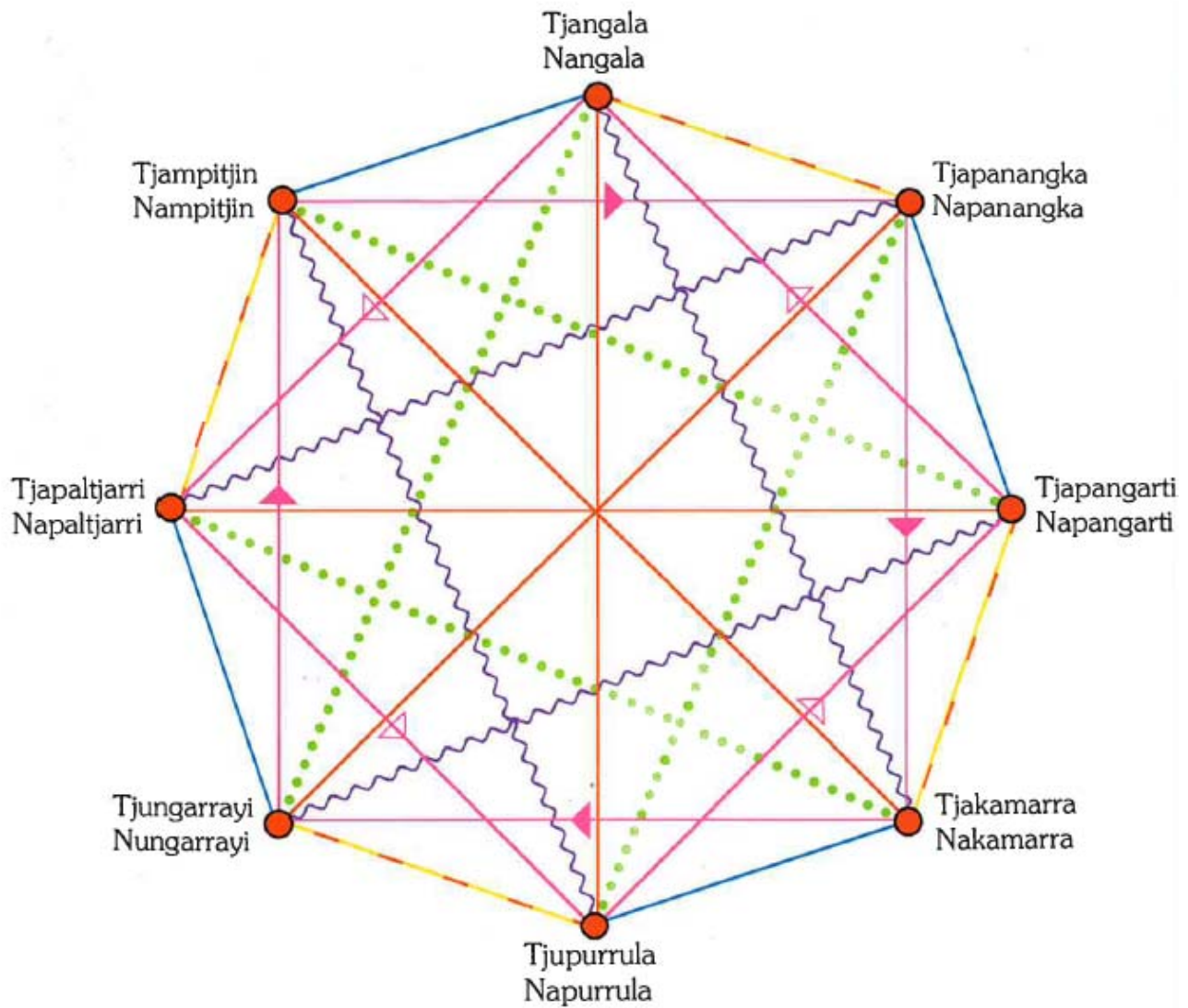


Diagram 8

 Nyuparra	Marriage	 Kaperli	Maternal Grandmother/Grandchild
 Tjiitji — Yipi	Children — Mother	 Tjamu	Maternal Grandfather/Grandchild
 Kamuru — Yurntalpa	Uncle — Niece, Nephew	 Pamku	Cousins
 Lamparr	Father-in-law/Son-in-law	 Yumari	Mother-in-law/Son-in-law
 Ngawatji	Paternal Grandmother/Grandchild	 Nyungarri	Mother-in-law/Daughter-in-law
 Kirlaki	Paternal Grandfather/Grandchild		
 Tjiitji — Mama	Children — Father		
 Pimiri — Yurntalpa	Aunty — Niece, Nephew		